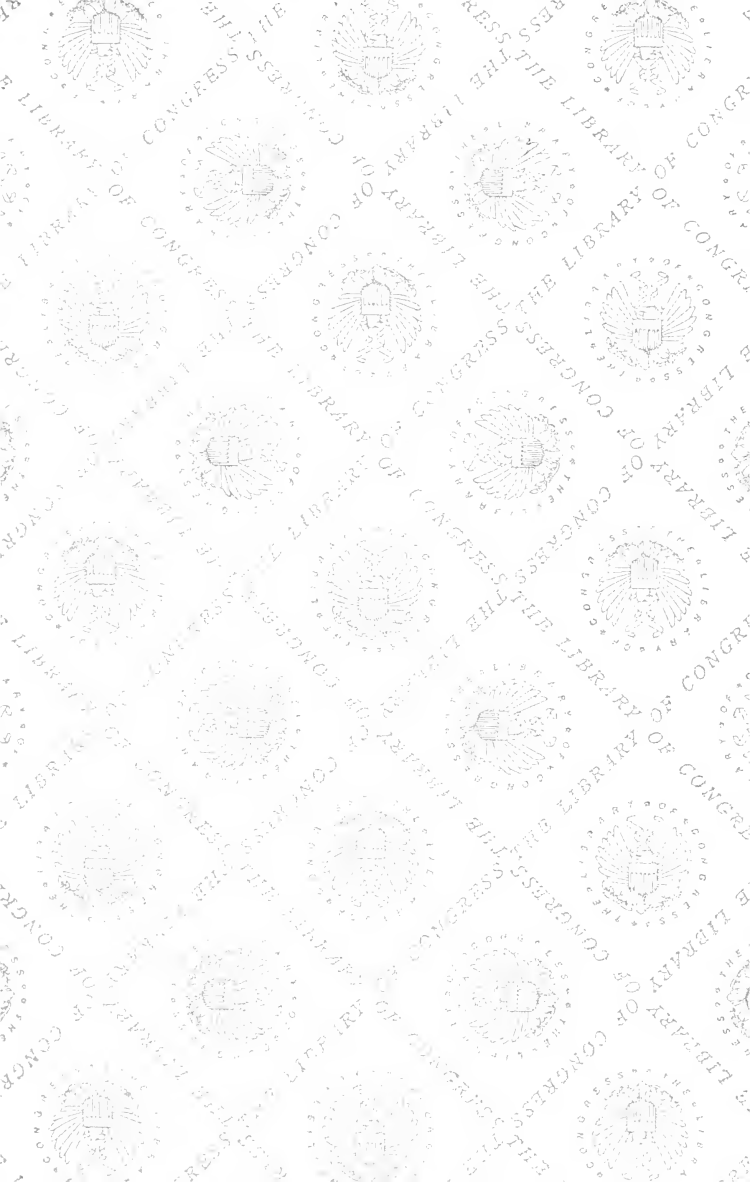


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LETTERS

FROM

JOHN QUINCY ADAMS

TO

HIS CONSTITUENTS

OF THE

TWELFTH CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT  
IN MASSACHUSETTS.

TO WHICH IS ADDED

HIS SPEECH IN CONGRESS,

DELIVERED

FEBRUARY 9, 1837.



BOSTON:

PUBLISHED BY ISAAC KNAPP,

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1837.

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## INTRODUCTORY REMARKS.

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THE following letters have been published, within a few weeks, in the Quincy (Mass.) Patriot. Notwithstanding the great importance of the subjects which they discuss, the intense interest which they are calculated to awaken throughout this commonwealth and the whole country, and the exalted reputation of their author as a profound statesman and powerful writer,—they are as yet hardly known beyond the limits of the constituency to whom they are particularly addressed. The reason of this is sufficiently obvious. John Quincy Adams belongs to neither of the prominent political parties, fights no partisan battles, and cannot be prevailed upon to sacrifice truth and principle upon the altar of party expediency and interest. Hence neither party is interested in defending his course, or in giving him an opportunity to defend himself. But, however systematic may be the efforts of mere partisan presses to suppress, and hold back from the public eye, the powerful and triumphant vindication of the Right of Petition, the graphic delineation of the Slavery spirit in Congress, and the humbling disclosure of northern cowardice and treachery, contained in these letters, they are destined to exert a powerful influence upon the public mind. They will constitute one of the most striking pages in the history of our times. They will be read with avidity in the North and in the South, and throughout Europe. Apart from the interest excited by the subjects under discussion, and viewed only as literary productions, they may be ranked among the highest intellectual efforts of their author. Their sarcasm is Junius-like—cold, keen, unsparing. In boldness, directness, and eloquent appeal, they will bear comparison with O'Connell's celebrated letters to the Reformers of Great Britain. They are the offspring of an intellect un-

shorn of its primal strength, and combining the ardor of youth with the experience of age.

The disclosure made in these letters, of the Slavery influence exerted in Congress over the representatives of the free states,—of the manner in which the rights of freemen have been bartered for southern votes, or basely yielded to the threats of men educated in despotism, and stamped by the free indulgence of unrestrained tyranny with the “odious peculiarities” of Slavery,—is painful and humiliating in the extreme. It will be seen, that, in the great struggle for and against the Right of Petition, an account of which is given in the following pages, their author stood, in a great measure, alone, and unsupported by his northern colleagues. On his “gray, discrowned head” the entire fury of slaveholding arrogance and wrath was expended. He stood alone—beating back, with his aged and single arm, the tide which would have borne down and overwhelmed a less sturdy and determined spirit.

We need not solicit for these letters, and the speech which accompanies them, a thorough perusal. They deserve, and we trust will receive, a circulation throughout the entire country. They will meet a cordial welcome from every lover of human liberty, from every friend of justice and the rights of man, irrespective of color or condition. The principles which they defend, the sentiments which they express, are those of Massachusetts, as recently asserted, almost unanimously, by her legislature. In both branches of that body, during the discussion of the subject of slavery and the right of petition, the course of the ex-President was warmly and eloquently commended. Massachusetts will sustain her tried and faithful representative; and the time is not far distant, when the best and worthiest citizens of the entire North will proffer him their thanks for his noble defence of *their* rights as *freemen*, and of the rights of the slave as a MAN.

J. G. W.

*Boston, May 16, 1837.*

# LETTERS.

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES U. S. }  
WASHINGTON, 3d March, 1837. }

*To the Inhabitants of the Twelfth Congressional District  
of Massachusetts.*

FELLOW-CITIZENS :—The proceedings of the House of Representatives, on the presentation of abolition and anti-slavery petitions, on the 23d of January, were so incorrectly reported in the National Intelligencer of the 25th, that I addressed a letter to the editors of that paper, pointing out some of its errors and omissions, which was published in their paper of the 30th.

On that day, I presented twenty-one petitions, all of which were laid on the table without being read, though, in every instance, I moved for the reading, which the Speaker refused to permit. From his decision I took, in every case, an appeal, and the appeal was in every case *laid on the table*, by a vote of the House, at the motion of a member from New Hampshire, Mr. Cushman. This gentleman, having been reported, in the Globe, as having voted against *receiving* the abolition petitions, addressed to the editors of that paper a letter correcting that error, and stating that he had voted for receiving them, and then for laying them on the table, where they might be taken up and acted upon whenever the House should think fit. Here, you will observe, was the line of separation between the northern anti-abolitionists and the southern slaveholders in the House. The practical result to the petitioner

was the same. His right of petition was in both cases suppressed. The freedom of speech in the House was equally denied to the members presenting the petition, to support, by argument, its prayer. But the slaveholder denied the right of Congress to *receive* the petition. His northern auxiliary receives the petition, and lays it on the table, to be taken up when time shall serve, but in the meantime refuses to hear it read. The slaveholder would strip Congress of the power. The northerner holds it in reserve. This distinction may hereafter prove to be a difference. Its present issue is the same.

I considered, as I stated in my address of the 31st of January, the system of action of the House upon the abolition petitions as settled for the remainder of the session. But between that and the next day for receiving petitions, Monday, the 6th of February, I received thirty petitions, among which were two which came to me by the mail, postmarked Fredericksburg, Virginia; one of them signed by nine names of women, in various hand-writing; some of them good, none of illiterate appearance. It prayed not for the abolition of slavery, but that Congress would put a stop to the slave-trade in the District of Columbia. It was accompanied by a letter signed by one of the names subscribed to the petition, requesting me to present it. The other purported to be from twenty-two *slaves*, subscribed so as to have every appearance of being genuine; the first name being in a hand-writing not absolutely bad, and subscribed also alone to a letter requesting me to present the petition. I believed the petition signed by female names to be genuine, and did not believe them to be names of free negroes or mulattoes; but had I known them to be such, that would not have deterred me from presenting it; the object of it being not only proper in itself, but laudable, and eminently fit for subscription by virtuous women of any color or complexion. I had suspicions that the other, purporting to be from slaves, came really from the hand of a master, who had prevailed on his slaves to sign it, that they might have the appearance of imploring the members from the North to cease offering petitions for their

emancipation, which could have no other tendency than to aggravate their servitude, and of being so impatient under the operation of petitions in their favor, as to pray that the northern members who should persist in presenting them should be *expelled*. Intimations of the same desire had already been manifested in quarters very remote from servitude, and not even professors of servility. They had been seen in a newspaper of this city, professedly devoted to the pure coinage of democracy from the mint of Van Buren and Rives, against the counterfeit currency of Benton and Amos Kendall. The Albany Argus itself, a paper known to be under the same influences, had lamented that the Massachusetts madman should *be permitted*, week after week,—to do what? to persist in presenting abolition petitions! This was the head and front of my offending; and for this alone, the petition from *slaves*, for my expulsion from the House, was but the echo of the distinct and explicit *call* from the Albany Argus and the Van Buren and Rives's Washingtonian.

But the petition, avowedly coming from slaves, though praying for my expulsion from the House if I should persevere in presenting abolition petitions, opened to my examination and inquiry a new question; or at least a question which had never occurred to me before, and which I never should have thought of starting upon speculation, namely: whether the right to petition Congress could in *any* case be exercised by slaves? And after giving to the subject all the reflection of which I was capable, I came to the conclusion, that however doubtful it might be whether slaves could petition Congress for any thing incompatible with their condition as slaves, and with their subjection to servitude, yet that, for all other wants, distresses, and grievances, incident to their nature as men, and to their relation as members,—degraded members as they may be,—of this community, they do enjoy the right of petition; and that, if they enjoy the right in any case whatever, there could be none in which they were more certainly entitled to it than that of deprecating the attempts of deluded friends to release them from bondage—

a case in which they alone could, in the nature of things, speak for themselves, and their masters could not possibly speak for them. The next question which I considered was, whether this paper was embraced by the resolution of the 18th of January; and of that, no man, understanding the English language, could entertain a moment's doubt.

But after settling these two questions to the satisfaction of my own mind, there remained another, with what temper they would be received in a House, the large majority of which consisted of slaveholders, and of their political northern associates, whose mouth-pieces had already put forth their feelers to familiarize the freemen of the North with the sight of a representative expelled from his seat for the single offence of persisting to present abolition petitions. I foresaw that the very conception of a petition from slaves would dismount all the slaveholding philosophy of the House, and expected it would produce an explosion, which would spend itself in wind. Without therefore presenting, or offering to present, the petition, I stated to the Speaker that I had such a paper in my possession, which I had been requested to present, and inquired whether it came within the resolution of the 18th of January. Now, the Speaker had decided that, under that order, no such paper should be read; yet his first impulse was to get possession of that paper; but I declined presenting it, till it should be decided whether it was embraced by the resolution of the 18th of January, or not. The Speaker, conscious as he was that it came so clearly within the *letter* of the resolution that it was *impossible* for him to decide that it did not, yet horrified at the idea of receiving and laying on the table a petition from slaves, said that, in a case so novel and extraordinary, he felt himself incompetent to decide, and must take the advice and direction of the House. One of the gross absurdities of the resolution, as administered by the Speaker, was, that every *paper* relating to slavery, or the abolition of slavery, should, *without being read*, be laid on the table. I had repeatedly remonstrated both against the resolution and

against his construction of it—in vain; and one of my purposes in putting this question to him was to expose the absurdity in its uncoverable nakedness. The resolution of the 18th of January presupposed by its own terms that every PAPER, relating to slavery or the abolition of slavery, should be *received*, without examination or inquiry whence it came, or what were its contents. There was neither exception nor qualification in the resolution, and the Speaker had decided that no such paper should be *read*. If I had stated that I had a petition from sundry persons in Fredericksburg, *relating to slavery*, without saying that the petitioners were, by their own avowal, *slaves*, the paper must have gone upon the table; but the discovery would soon have been made that it came from slaves, and then the tempest of indignation would have burst upon me with tenfold fury, and I should have been charged with having fraudulently introduced a petition from slaves, without letting the House know the condition of the petitioners.

To avoid the responsibility of such a charge, I put the question to the Speaker, giving him notice that the petition purported to come from slaves, and that I had suspicions that it came from another and a very different source. The Speaker, after failing in the attempt to obtain possession of the paper, referred my question to the House for decision; and then ensued a scene of which I propose to give you an account in a subsequent address, entreating you only to remember, if what I have said, or may say to you hereafter, on this subject, should tax your patience, that the stake in question is your right of petition, your freedom of thought and of action, and the freedom of speech in Congress of your representative.

JOHN QUINCY ADAMS.

WASHINGTON, 8th March, 1837.

*To the Inhabitants of the Twelfth Congressional District of Massachusetts.*

FELLOW-CITIZENS :—When, on the 6th of February last, the Speaker of the House of Representatives of the United States transferred to *the House* the responsibility of answering the question which I had addressed to him, whether a petition, which I held in my hand, purporting to come from *slaves*, was or was not embraced by the resolution of the preceding 18th of January, prescribing that all such papers should be laid on the table, without being printed or referred, and without any further action of the House upon them whatever : the most remarkable characteristic of the debate which followed, was the struggle of the slave representation to escape from answering the question. They never did answer it. There are in the House one hundred representatives of slaves, about eighty of whom were present. There was not a man among them who did not know, or who dared to deny, that it was included in that resolution ; and the first of them who rose, Mr. Haynes, of Georgia, after expressing his astonishment and surprise at my audacity, not only then, but on former days, in presenting abolition petitions, fairly acknowledged that he did not know how to answer my question, and thought it might be giving too much importance to the petition to object to its being received. He then proceeded in a strain of invective upon me, till I called him to order ; upon which he proceeded to announce his intention to move that the petition should be rejected, subject to the alternative of a permission, that it should be withdrawn. But I had not presented the petition. It was not in the possession of the House, and therefore could neither be rejected, nor by the order of the House withdrawn. Besides, the impulse of the slave representation was not to answer the question, but to punish, or at least to frighten the inquirer. Mr. Haynes was immediately admonished



that no slaveholder must offer such a motion, and immediately withdrew that which he had proposed to make. The torrid zone was in commotion. Half-subdued calls of *Expel him, expel him*, were heard from various parts of the Hall, and the boldest spirits, without yet venturing upon any specific charge, were instigating each other to some deed of noble daring, and of instant execution, to vindicate the insulted honor of the South. At this moment, Mr. John M. Patton, of Virginia, the representative of the District of which Fredericksburg forms a part, one of the ablest, most independent, and most rational of the slaveholding members, seeing into what absurdities they were about to rush, attempted to divert the torrent of their wrath into another channel. He said he was for going to the fountain-head at once, and asked leave to offer a resolution, not concerning the petition from slaves, but that the petition from nine *women*, of Fredericksburg, which had been received and laid on the table, under the order of the 18th of January, should be taken off the table and returned to the member from Massachusetts who had offered it. The rules of the House were forthwith suspended, to enable him to offer it; and he did offer it. The reason that he alleged for his resolution was, that the petition came from free negroes, and colored persons of bad character. This was ingeniously devised, but did not suit the fiery temper of the moment. One member was of opinion, that if the gentleman from Massachusetts was to receive any countenance from the House, it was time for the members from the South to go home. Another thought that if any man should disgrace the government under which he lived, by presenting a petition from slaves praying for emancipation, the petition should, by order of the House, be committed to the flames, to which combustion another member opined, that the man who should present the petition should also be consigned. The furnace was now sufficiently heated, and Mr. Thompson, of South Carolina, a gentleman of great politeness and courtesy, offered as an amendment to the proposition the following resolution :

"*Resolved*, That the Honorable John Quincy Adams, by the attempt just made by him to introduce a petition, purporting on its face to be from slaves, has been guilty of a gross disrespect to the House, and that he be *instantly* brought to the bar, to receive the severe censure of the Speaker."

This was the first of a series of resolutions, which absorbed three days of the time of the House, but upon which I shall not now waste yours. I invite your attention to it now, only to request you to mark its characteristic *tone*. Mr. Jefferson has observed that the intercourse between master and slave is a perpetual succession of boisterous and degrading passions; and it is in the order of nature that the habitual indulgence of this temper of overbearing domination insensibly pervades the general character of the master, and urges him to assume a tone of superiority over his equals, and to hold this lofty bearing just so far as he finds it tolerated without rebuke. On the floor of the House of Representatives, the members, whether representing slaves or mere freemen, are upon a footing of perfect equality with each other. Can you believe that your representative, on that common floor, for asking of the Speaker the simple question, whether a petition from slaves came within the resolution of the House, which it unquestionably did, became, from that instant, in the eyes of these master-members, a criminal to be punished, and that the only question between them was, whether he should be *instantly* dragged to the bar, and severely censured by a master-speaker, or expelled from the House, or burnt with his petition at the stake?

The whole transaction, from beginning to end, was in the highest degree disorderly. The resolution offered by Mr. Waddy Thompson was itself wholly out of order as an amendment to Mr. Patton's resolution, which related to a subject altogether different. The Speaker's duty was to reject at once Mr. Thompson's resolution as out of order; but the Speaker was a master, and he received it. Mr. Thompson's resolution was tinkered between him and Mr. Haynes, and Mr. Lewis, of Alabama, till it assumed the following shape :—

"*Resolved*, That John Quincy Adams, a member from the State of Massachusetts, by his attempts to introduce into this House a petition from slaves, for the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia, committed an outrage on the rights and feelings of a large portion of the people of this Union; a flagrant contempt of the dignity of this House; and, by extending to slaves a privilege only belonging to freemen, directly invites the slave population to insurrection; and that the said member be forthwith called to the bar of the House, to be censured by the Speaker."

My constituents! reflect upon the purport of this resolution, which was immediately accepted by Mr. Thompson, as a modification of his own, and as unhesitatingly received by the Speaker. He well knew that I had made no attempt to introduce in the House a petition from slaves, and if I had, he knew that I should have done no more than exercise my right as a member of the House, and that the utmost extent of the power of the House would have been to refuse to receive the petition. The Speaker's duty was to reject instantaneously this resolution, and to tell Mr. Lewis and Mr. Thompson, that the first of his obligations was, to protect the rights of speech of members of that House, which I had not in the slightest degree infringed. But the Speaker was a *master*.

Observe, too, that, in this resolution, the notable discovery was first made, that I had directly invited the slaves to insurrection, of which bright thought Mr. Thompson afterwards availed himself, to threaten me with the grand jury of the District and the penitentiary, as an incendiary and a felon. I pray you to remember this, not on my account, or from the suspicion that I could, or shall ever, be moved from my purpose by such menaces, but to give you the *measure* of slaveholding freedom—of speech, of the press, of action, of thought! If such a question as I asked of the Speaker is a direct invitation of the slaves to insurrection, forfeiting all my rights as a representative of the people, subjecting me to indictment by a grand jury, to conviction by a petit jury, and to an infamous penitentiary cell—I ask you not what freedom of speech is left to your representative in Congress, but what freedom of speech, of the press, and of thought, is left to you?

A slaveholding President of the United States has ur-

gently recommended to Congress the enactment of a law to prohibit, *under severe penalties*, "the circulation in the Southern States, through the mail, of incendiary publications, intended to instigate the slaves to insurrection." That law the Congress of the United States have hitherto had too much self-respect to pass. But if it had, this resolution, the fruit of the combined wisdom of slave representation from South Carolina and Alabama, furnishes for your use an ample commentary to expound what *they* understand and mean by incendiary publications intended to instigate the slaves to insurrection; and what they of course would have excluded by severe penalties from circulation by the mail.

Mr. Patton, whose seat was next to mine, and at the same table, had got a hint, perhaps from me, or from hearing my answer to some inquirer at my seat, that the petition was *not* for the abolition of slavery, and he knew that I had not attempted to offer it; he therefore cautioned the movers of the resolutions, that their proceedings were rather harsh, and somewhat over-hasty in their assumption of facts. This gave me the first opportunity of interposing a word of self-defence—for which I refer you to my next address.

JOHN QUINCY ADAMS.



WASHINGTON, 13th March, 1837.

*To the Inhabitants of the Twelfth Congressional District of Massachusetts.*

FELLOW-CITIZENS:—When the cooling potion administered, by Mr. Patton, to the burning thirst for my punishment, of the members from Alabama and South Carolina, began to take effect, I rose and inquired of the Speaker how it happened that a direct resolution calling for instantaneous censure upon me, had been substituted for the resolution offered by Mr. Patton, and which he had obtained, by a vote of two thirds of the House, the suspen-

sion of the rules to enable him to offer—which resolution was that the petition from the *nine women* of Fredericksburg, which had been laid on the table under the order of the 18th of January, should be taken and returned to me. The Speaker said that it was by the well-known parliamentary rule that a *question of privilege* supersedes all other subjects of debate, and takes precedence of all others. I told him I was satisfied, for I knew it would be in vain to remonstrate. But the Speaker well knew there was no ground for a question of privilege, and it was his duty to arrest the resolution of censure at its first presentation. But if there had been such ground, the resolution of censure could not be offered as an amendment to a resolution which involved no question of privilege. Mr. Patton's resolution respecting the petition of the nine women, was no question of privilege. When Mr. Thompson offered, as an amendment to it, the resolution of direct censure upon me, the Speaker's duty was to reject it as not in order, and he would have saved three days of very useless debate. The Speaker, whether from incompetency or unwillingness to discriminate between the questions of privilege and the unprivileged questions in this case, continued to confound them together throughout the whole of these discussions, and contributed thereby to render the whole debate as ridiculous as it was disorderly. The whole proceeding hitherto had been such a scene of blind precipitancy and fury, that I had not had a moment of time to interpose and stay the whirlwind. I had compassion upon Messrs. Thompson and Lewis, and told them, that, if they intended to bring me to the bar, to receive the censure of the Speaker, they must amend their resolution, and then intimated to them, that their specification of my crime must be, that I had in my possession a petition from slaves, praying for that which they themselves most ardently desired—namely, my expulsion from the House, if I should persist in presenting abolition petitions. The fact was so—but the ludicrous position into which they had floundered was that of calling down censure upon a member of the House for they knew not what

—for phantoms of their own imagination—for the contents of a petition which they had not suffered to be read, and which no one but myself knew.

You will readily conceive that this explanation was not altogether satisfactory to those whose passions had so far outstripped their reason. Mr. Mann, a somewhat distinguished member from the state of New York, supplied them with cold comfort, by a long discourse against abolition and *fanatics*—entreating *the gentlemen from the South* not to make themselves uneasy about their slaves, nor to take too much to heart my exceedingly improper conduct in presenting, week after week, these abolition petitions; but to consider that I was a venerable, superannuated person, who in my better days would not have done so; and that now some mischievous persons had been trifling with me, and I had been trifling with the House.

But the *gentlemen from the South* were not to be so appeased. They very justly thought that this was no joking matter. Mr. Thompson, of South Carolina, now thought my conduct worse than he had thought before—and instead of one resolution, he was now prepared to offer three.

1. "That the Hon. John Quincy Adams, by an effort to present a petition from slaves, has committed a great contempt of this House.

2. "That the member from Massachusetts above named, by creating the impression, and leaving the House under that impression, that the said petition was for the abolition of slavery, when he knew that it was not, has trifled with the House.

3. "That the Hon. John Quincy Adams receive the censure of the House for his conduct referred to in the preceding resolutions."

Here you see, instead of one crime, I had committed two—first, by *an effort* to present a petition from slaves, which was a great contempt of the House; secondly, by creating an impression, and leaving the House under it, that the petition was for the abolition of slavery, when I knew it was not—this was trifling with the House, and for these crimes I was to be censured. *An effort to present a petition*, a great contempt of the House! Creating an impression, and leaving the House under that impression,

trifling with the House! In the annals of parliamentary deliberation, were such offences ever heard of before? Where, but in an assemblage of slave drivers and slaves, would you have believed that such resolutions could be offered, and entertained, and discussed, hour after hour? Yet there they stand, recorded on the Journals of the House of Representatives of the United States. They consumed all the remnant of the day. The gentlemen from the South had all the argument to themselves, and went on creating impressions and leaving the House under them, till, as evening twilight came on, Mr. Cambreleng told them that he was himself a native of a Southern State, and held the abolitionists in proper abomination; that he did at first intend to vote with them for censuring me, till he discovered that the petition was not for the abolition of slavery, but the reverse. It was evidently a *hoax*, played upon me *by a southern man*; and there might be members in the House who knew something about it. That I, to be sure, had been very troublesome by presenting so many abolition petitions; but I had *made atonement* for that by declaring my opinion against the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia, and more than five years since he had heard me say that the remedy was worse than the disease. The gentlemen from the South were exasperated by these cool and cutting sarcasms, gravely delivered by the Chairman of the Committee of Ways and Means, till he was called upon for personal explanations. Some of them were for transferring the resolutions of censure for trifling with the House, from me to him; and some for joining him with me as an accomplice in the offence. In this temper the House adjourned; not a word having been said by me, or by any one in my behalf, since the new batch of censorial resolutions had been brought forth. Towards the close of the day, Mr. Haynes, the gentleman who at first did not know whether it would not be giving too much importance to a petition from slaves to object to receiving it, moved as an amendment to the three resolutions of Mr. Thompson, the following:—

*"Resolved, That John Quincy Adams, a representative from the state of Massachusetts, has rendered himself justly liable to the severest censure of this House, and is censured accordingly, for having attempted to present to the House the petition of slaves."*

And this resolution came on the next morning, immediately after the reading of the Journal, and its correction, which was amended at my motion.

The question before the House was thus much simplified, and my crime now consisted only in *attempting* to present to the House a petition from slaves. But Mr. Jenifer, a very spirited slaveholding gentleman from Maryland, who had taken the floor at the close of the session of the day before, now announced that he wanted more specific information, before he should vote upon this resolution, and, in something of an overseer's tone, called upon me explicitly to declare whether a statement in the *Globe* of that morning, of what I had said the day before, was or was not correct—or whether I had attempted to present a petition from slaves. I answered his inquiry without delay; by stating that I had made no such attempt; that the report in the *Globe* was correct; that I had merely told the Speaker that I had a paper purporting to be a petition from slaves, which I was requested to present; that I had inquired of the Speaker whether it came within the resolution of the 18th of January, to which question I was yet waiting for an answer, and, if that answer should be that it did, I should present the petition. For the gentleman from Maryland must understand, that if slaves were laboring under grievances and afflictions not incident to their condition as slaves, but to their nature as human beings, born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward, and it were within the power and competency of the House to afford them relief, and they should petition for it—if the House would permit me, I most assuredly would present their petition, and if that avowal deserved the censure of the House, I was ready to receive it—for petition was prayer—it was the cry of the suffering for relief; of the oppressed for mercy. It was what God did not disdain to receive from man, whom he had created;



and to listen to prayer—to hearken to the groan of wretchedness—was not merely a duty; it was a privilege; it was enjoyment; it was the exercise of a godlike attribute, indulged to the kindly sympathies of man. I would therefore not deny the right of petition to slaves—I would not deny it to a horse or a dog, if they could articulate their sufferings, and I could relieve them. If slaves should petition for any thing improper, unreasonable, or which ought not to be granted, I might pause, or refuse to present their petition; but if the object prayed for was just and reasonable in itself, and I had the power to grant it, I would—unless forbidden by the House—I would present it;

“For earthly power doth then show likest God’s,  
When mercy seasons justice.”

From this time, Mr. Jenifer was ready to pass any censure upon me without hesitation. He was sure I was the only man in the House who believed that slaves could, in any case whatever, have the right to petition, and he gave me up as a reprobate spirit, worthy of any punishment that could be inflicted upon me—only regretting that I had not presented the petition, that he might have the opportunity to vote for my expulsion from the House.

Still, it was obvious, on the state of facts, that I had not *attempted* to present to the House a petition from slaves. The resolution of Mr. Haynes, therefore, could not be made to suit the *master* appetite of revenge, till at last Mr. Dromgoole, of Virginia, bethought himself of suggesting to Mr. Waddy Thompson, as a substitute for his three resolutions, the following:—

“*Resolved*, That the Hon. John Quincy Adams, a member of the House, by stating in his place that he had in his possession a paper, purporting to be a petition from slaves, and inquiring if it was within the meaning of a resolution heretofore adopted, (as preliminary to its presentation,) has *given color to the idea* that slaves have the right to petition, and of his readiness to be their organ; and that, for the same, he deserves the censure of this House.

“*Resolved*, That the aforesaid John Quincy Adams receive a censure from the Speaker, in the presence of the House of Representatives.”

Here I must do Mr. Dromgoole the justice to admit, that the facts were for the first time stated with correctness

and precision. I had given color to the idea, that the right of petition is confined to no color, and of my readiness to be the organ of slaves petitioning for redress of grievances which they only could suffer, and of which no voice but their own could complain. This was my offence, and this I had the more readily avowed, at the requisition of Mr. Jenifer, because, in the peremptory bluster of his manner, I had perceived the disposition to alarm me out of the admission, as, in the taunting confidence of his reply, that I was the *only* man in the House who entertained that opinion, I saw at once the exultation of his reliance upon numbers to put me down, and the disappointment of his failure in the attempt to intimidate me into a recantation or apology. And so satisfactory to the master-spirit of the South were the resolutions of Mr. Dromgoole, that Mr. Waddy Thompson accepted them as a modification of his own; and Mr. Haynes, with a view to speedy action, withdrew his proposed amendment, and left them in the possession of the field.

And thus my crime of *giving color to an idea*, was bandied about among *the gentlemen from the South*, till two of the slave representation themselves, men of intelligent minds and of intrepid spirits, fairly revolting at the senseless injustice of all these resolutions of censure upon me, dared to come out and declare their resistance to any resolution of censure upon me, for what I had done.—The first of these was Mr. Robertson, of Virginia, who thought, indeed, my course in persisting to present abolition petitions very offensive; and my avowal that I did believe slaves to possess in *any* case a right to petition, an aggravation of all my preceding offences—but who could not consent to join in trampling under foot the freedom of speech of the members of the House. Mr. Robertson was also the first who assigned a reason for denying to slaves the right of petition, which was, that Congress, having no right to interfere in the law of slavery at all, could not grant the prayer of any petition from slaves. This was begging the question; but it was argument, and not frenzy. From this time, all hope of carrying a vote of direct censure upon me was

forlorn. Mr. Thompson complained of the instability of his brother slaveholders in the House, but yesterday so fiercely bent upon punishment, that they had spurred him on, and thought his resolutions not severe enough, now dropping off one by one, and flinching even from a vote of disapprobation against me. He, however, was not to be found so pliable. He would adhere inflexibly to his resolutions, though he should be left to vote for them alone, and would comfort himself with the reflection that the smaller the number who should support him, the greater the honor.

This was the last flickering of the flame which had burnt so intensely for nearly two days. Mr. Robertson's speech had broken the spell of slaveholding unanimity into which they had been constantly spiriting and lashing one another against me, and against the abolitionists, and against the North. To cover their retreat, Mr. Bynum, of North Carolina, one of the warmest champions of the South, after a long and bitter speech, moved, as a substitute for Mr. Waddy Thompson's third modification of his resolutions, the following:—

*“Resolved, That any attempt to present any petition or memorial, from any slave or slaves, negro or free negroes, from any part of the Union, is a contempt of the House, calculated to embroil it in strife and confusion, incompatible with the dignity of the body; and any member guilty of the same justly subjects himself to the censure of the House.”*

*“Resolved, further, That a committee be appointed to inquire into the fact whether any such attempt has been made by any member of the House, and report the same as soon as practicable.”*

The whole doctrine of *contempts*, as borrowed from the practice of the British Parliament, is a law of tyranny, in which the House is at once accuser, party, judge, and executioner. Mr. Bynum's resolutions improve upon this system, by adding to these complicated attributes of the House, that of a retrospective legislator. Mr. Bynum dropped all mention of direct censure upon me, but he proposed, *ex post facto*, to declare to be a contempt of the House, that which no one before had even dreamt to be such. To *attempt* to present a petition not only from any slave, but from any free negro in any part of the Union,

was, by Mr. Bynum's resolutions, not made a contempt for the future, but declared to be so already; and his second resolution proposed the appointment of a committee to inquire and report to the House whether such an *attempt* had been made by any member of the House.

Now, the Journals of the House bear record of repeated instances of petitions from free negroes and people of color, received, referred to committees, and reported upon, like others, without question of the right of the petitioners. The Constitution of the United States prohibits Congress from passing any *law* abridging the right of petition; and here, Mr. Bynum proposes, without law, by a mere resolution of the House, to abridge the right of petition, by declaring it a contempt of the House to attempt to present one—and then he institutes a court of inquiry, with himself at its head, and associates appointed by the master-Speaker, to ascertain and report whether such an attempt had been made by any member.

By the propositions of Mr. Bynum, the House, by resolution, would have made a law constituting a crime *ex post facto*; and then raised a Committee to ascertain and report whether any member had broken the law before it was made.

At this new turn of the debate, Mr. Graves, of Kentucky, following the example of Mr. Robertson, declared himself explicitly opposed to any resolution of censure upon me. He went further, and avowed the opinion that Congress have *power* to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia, though well aware that by this avowal he hazarded the displeasure of a great part of the slave representation in the House, and of many of his own constituents. Mr. Graves, like Mr. Robertson, was severe in his animadversions upon my course as a presenter of abolition petitions; and I should have felt with deep mortification the reproof of men so intelligent, fair-minded, and honorable, as I know them to be, had I not acted throughout the whole of these transactions under an impulse of a higher duty than it is in the competency of human approbation to command or to reward. They hazarded much in the land of

slavery, even in showing by their deeds and words that they know what freedom is. I honor them for their spirit; I thank them for their defence of the freedom of speech in the House of which they were members—a defence the more creditable to them, inasmuch as it was the defence of their adversary against their allies; and I regret that, refusing to join in a vote of formal censure upon me by the House, they should have thought it necessary to express their individual censure upon my exercise of a right which they could not deny, and would not refuse.

Immediately preceding the offer of Mr. Bynum's resolutions, Governor Lincoln spoke the first word in my defence which had been uttered in the House. His speech has been well reported, published in several newspapers, and in a pamphlet, and has, I presume, been generally read by you. On the manner in which he spoke of me, it would not become me to remark. Of that in which he vindicated your character and honor, his hearers will long retain the memory; nor will it ever be forgotten by me.

Mr. Phillips represented to the Speaker that Mr. Bynum's resolutions, not being within the question of privilege, could not be moved as an amendment to the resolutions of censure; but the Speaker decided that they were in order, and Mr. Phillips had no alternative but to submit.

Mr. Patton tried his hand again. He moved as an amendment to Mr. Bynum's amendment of Mr. Waddy Thompson's third set of censorial resolutions, all moved as amendments to Mr. Patton's resolution that the petition from nine women of Fredericksburg should be taken up from the table and returned to me, and all decided by the Speaker to be perfectly in order. Mr. Patton now moved the following:—

*“Resolved, That the right of petition does not belong to the slaves of this Union, and that no petition from them can be presented to this House, without derogating from the rights of the slaveholding states, and endangering the integrity of the Union.*

*“Resolved, That any member who shall hereafter present any such petition to the House, ought to be considered as regardless of the feelings of the House, the rights of the South, and an enemy to the Union.*

"*Resolved*, That the Hon. John Quincy Adams having solemnly disclaimed all design of doing any thing disrespectful to the House, in the inquiry he made of the Speaker, as to the petition purporting to be from slaves, and having avowed his intention not to offer to present the petition, if the House was of opinion that it ought not to be presented: therefore all further proceedings in regard to his conduct now cease."

These resolutions of Mr. Patton were one step further backward behind those of Mr. Bynum. The first of them declares that the right of petition does not belong to the slaves of this Union, and thus far it approached my question to the Speaker, but did not answer it; and to the negation of the right of the slave, it added a new offence to the criminal code, which, taken in connection with the second resolution, amounted to nothing less than constructive treason.

The second resolution endeavors, indeed, to elude the prohibition, by the constitution, of the enactment of *ex post facto* laws, by confining to future time the declaratory law of treason. Nor does it provide a punishment for this atrocious crime. It only says that any member who shall *hereafter* present any such petition to the House *ought to be considered* as regardless of the feelings of the House, the rights of the South, and an *enemy to the Union*.

Now, the Constitution of the United States declares that treason against the United States shall consist *only* in levying war against them, or in adhering to their *enemies*, giving them aid and comfort: but here is a resolution declaring that a member of the House ought to be considered as an *enemy to the Union*—FOR PRESENTING A PETITION.

The Constitution of the United States gives to each House of Congress the power to determine the rules of its proceedings, to punish its members for disorderly behavior, and, with the concurrence of two thirds, to expel a member. The power of punishment by the House is limited to the offence of disorderly behavior. If this resolution had been adopted, and any member should hereafter have presented a petition from slaves, what could they have done with him? There is not a word or syllable in the Constitution or laws of the United States, which prohibits slaves from petitioning, or a member of either House of

Congress from presenting their petitions. There is an express provision of the Constitution that Congress shall pass no *law abridging* the right of petition; and here is a resolution, declaring that a member ought to be considered as regardless of the feelings of the House, the rights of the South, and an enemy to the Union, *for presenting a petition*.

Regardless of the feelings of the House! What have the feelings of the House to do with the free agency of a member in the discharge of his duty? One of the most sacred duties of a member is to present the petitions committed to his charge—a duty which he cannot refuse or neglect to perform, without violating his oath to support the Constitution of the United States. He is not, indeed, bound to present all petitions. If the language of the petition be disrespectful to the House, or to any of its members—if the prayer of the petition be unjust, immoral, or unlawful—if it be accompanied by any manifestation of intended violence or disorder on the part of the petitioners, the duty of the member to present it ceases; not from respect for the feelings of the House, but because these things themselves strike at the freedom of speech and action, as well of the House as of its members. Neither of these can be in the slightest degree affected by the mere circumstance of the condition of the petitioner, nor is there a shadow of reason why the feelings of the House should be outraged, by the presentation of a petition from slaves, any more than by petitions from soldiers in the army, from seamen in the navy, or from the working-women of a manufactory.

Regardless of the rights of the South! What are the rights of the South? What is the *South*? As a component portion of this Union, the population of the South consists of masters, of slaves, and of free persons, white and colored, without slaves. Of which of these classes would the *rights* be disregarded by the presentation of a petition from slaves? Surely not those of the slaves themselves; the suffering, the laborious, the *producing* class. Oh, no! there would be no disregard of *their* rights

in the presentation of a petition from them. The very essence of the crime consists in an alleged *undue* regard for their rights; in not denying them the rights of human nature; in not classing them with horses, and dogs, and cats. Neither could the rights of the free people, without slaves, whether white, black, or colored, be disregarded by the presentation of a petition from slaves. Their rights could not be affected by it at all. The rights of the South, then, here mean the rights of the masters of slaves, which, to describe them by an inoffensive word, I will call the rights of *mastery*. These, by the Constitution of the United States, are recognized, not directly, but by implication; and protection is stipulated for them, by that instrument, to a certain extent. But they are rights incompatible with the inalienable rights of all mankind, as set forth in the Declaration of Independence; incompatible with the fundamental principles of the constitutions of all the free states of the Union, and therefore, when provided for in the Constitution of the United States, are indicated by expressions which must receive the narrowest and most restricted construction, and never be enlarged by implication. There is, I repeat, not one word, not one syllable in the Constitution of the United States, which interdicts to Congress the reception of petitions from slaves; and as there is express interdiction to Congress to abridge, by law, the right of petition, that right, upon every principle of fair construction, is as much the right of the South as of the North, as much the right of the slave as of the master; and the presentation of a petition from slaves, for a legitimate object, respectful in its language, and in its tone and character submissive to the decision which the House may pass upon it, far from disregarding the rights of the South, is a mark of signal homage to those rights.

An enemy to the Union! for presenting a petition! an enemy to the Union! I have shown that the presentation of petitions is among the most imperious duties of a member of Congress. I trust I have shown that the right to petition, guarantied to the people of the United States, without exception of slaves, express or implied, cannot be



*abridged* by any act of both Houses, with the approbation of the President of the United States ; but this resolution, by the act of one branch of the legislature, would effect an enormous abridgment of the right of petition, not only by denying it to one full sixth part of the whole people, but by declaring an enemy to the Union any member of the House who should present such a petition.

The third resolution, as if repenting of the concession that the presentation of petitions from slaves was not yet the heinous crime, which, according to the second, it was to be considered hereafter, graciously tendered to me a cessation of prosecution, for what was no offence, in consideration of my disclaimer of any intention to trifle with the House, and my promise not to present the petition if the House should refuse to receive it.

Yet these were the resolutions of a gentleman, who, upon every question disconnected with the color of the skin, is just, and fair, and intelligent, and inflexibly devoted to the principles of freedom.

These resolutions did not answer my question, but the first of them distinctly affirmed that the right of petition does not belong to the slaves of this Union. Mr. Patton assigned no reason for this averment, nor is there any thing in the Constitution or laws to sustain it. In the debate which ensued, and which consumed the remainder of the day, Mr. Cushing, in a very eloquent speech, proved it to be utterly untenable, and that the right of petition was a primitive, inalienable right, recognized by the Constitution of the United States as preëxisting to itself, and guarded from *abridgment*, in express terms, by one of its articles.

At this stage of the proceedings of the House, the day for opening and counting the votes, and declaring the result of the presidential election for the term of four years, then about to commence, intervened. The question for that day was suspended, and resumed on Thursday, the 9th of February, by an elaborate speech from Mr. French, of Kentucky. This gentleman is a judge, and made the only argument against the right of slaves to petition, which was delivered in the whole of this three days' debate.

And what think you was the main stay of his argument It was, that if slavery should be abolished in the slaveholding states, they would lose a part of their representation in Congress.

Mr. Milligan, the member from Delaware, moved to lay the whole subject on the table, but, upon my earnest remonstrance against this course, withdrew the motion.

Mr. Evans, of Maine, took the floor, and after reviewing and covering with ridicule the whole series of resolutions of censure upon me, was proceeding to a full defence and vindication of the abolition petitions, and of the character of the petitioners, when he was arrested by calls to order. The slave representation in the House could not endure, and would not tolerate, the discussion of the question whether slavery is a blessing to be perpetuated, or an evil to be removed. Mr. Evans was not permitted to proceed but upon restrictions and conditions to which he would not submit, and he yielded the floor to the *masterly* impartiality of the Speaker.

Mr. Patton presented a new modification of his resolutions, omitting the first, and reducing the second to the following terms:—

*“Resolved, That any member who shall hereafter present to the House any petition from the slaves of this Union, ought to be considered as regardless of the feelings of the House, the right of the Southern States, and unfriendly to the Union.”*

The third resolution was left as it had been offered on Tuesday.

This was the ultimatum, after three days of debate, nine tenths of which, at least, were occupied by the slave representation in adjusting the form in which they were to settle the principles of this controversy; this was the ultimatum of the law which they were now to dictate, and of the new offence by which they were to circumscribe the freedom of speech of the members of the House from the free portion of this Union, with reference to petitions from slaves.

The averment that the right of petition does not belong to the slaves of this Union was withdrawn, and the reso-

lution, denouncing as a crime the presentation hereafter of any petition from the slaves of this Union was so far mitigated as to make it not quite treason. The member who should dare to present such a petition, was still to be considered as regardless of the feelings of the House—not indeed of the rights of the South, but of the right of the Southern States—and although not absolutely an enemy, yet *unfriendly* to the Union.

This, I say, was the ultimatum of the slave representation. Mr. Waddy Thompson accepted Mr. Patton's two resolutions, now presented, as a modification of all his preceding modifications. Mr. Bynum withdrew his proposed amendment, and Mr. Vanderpool, of New York, called for the *previous question*.

I had not yet been heard in my own defence. I claimed that privilege, and entreated Mr. Vanderpool to withdraw his motion, which he declined. The House, however, by a vote of 109 to 79, refused to second him, and I had permission to speak.

The substance of what I said has been published in the National Intelligencer, and more fully in the Boston Daily Advocate. It has also been republished in one of the newspapers within your district.

The previous question was then renewed, and after some explanations from Mr. Thompson, of South Carolina, separate questions were taken, by yeas and nays, upon each of Mr. Patton's resolutions; the first of which was rejected by a vote of 105 to 92; the second by a vote of 137 to 21; thirty-nine members, who had voted upon the first resolution, not voting at all upon the second.

The first was the only question of any importance with regard to the settlement of principles. Had it passed, it would have put an end to all freedom of speech and action in the House, for its object was not to declare that slaves have not the right of petition, but to make it an offence against the House, the Southern States, and the Union, to *present a petition*. The resolution applied, not to the

right of the slave to petition, but to the right of the member to present the petition of slaves.

The vote upon this resolution drew the line of demarcation between the free and the slave representation more closely than perhaps any other vote ever taken in the House. Of the ninety-two members, who voted for the resolution, thirteen only were from the non-slaveholding states; and in the following proportions—six from New York, two from Maine, one from New Hampshire, one from Connecticut, two from Ohio, and one from Indiana, all politically devoted to the President elect. Of the slaveholding states, four members only voted against the resolution—the member from Delaware, almost a free state, two from Kentucky, and one from Missouri.

Fellow citizens:—Had the transactions of which I have given you this tedious detail, been merely conflicts of personal concernment to me—had they been merely desperate assaults upon my good name and character, for the purpose of destroying or undermining your confidence in me as your representative—I should have felt myself justified in asking your patient indulgence to the narrative, in justification of myself and of my conduct in your service. But higher motives have impelled me to this appeal to yourselves.

Since the existence of the Constitution of the United States, there has never before been an example of an attempt in the House of Representatives to punish one of its members for words spoken by him in the performance of his duty. The utmost constitutional power of the House would be to regard such words as disorderly, and to reprove the speaker of them by declaring them such. It is expressly provided by the Constitution, that for any speech or debate in either House of Congress, no senator or representative shall be questioned in any other place; but in this case, your representative was seriously, deliberately, and persistingly threatened with a prosecution, by a slaveholding grand jury, and a sentence to the penitentiary as an incendiary, for asking a question of the Speaker of the House. I will not recur to the history of

the country from which we derive our descent, and especially our principles of freedom of speech and action in legislative assemblies, for examples, in which motions for total revolutions in the government, for subversion of the established religion, for setting aside and altering the succession to the crown, have been invariably held to be within the general freedom of speech and action to which every member of parliament is entitled. If I had offered in the House a resolution proposing an amendment to the Constitution of the United States, emancipating all the slaves in the Union, and declaring slavery, within its borders, forever abolished, I should have done nothing beyond the exercise of my rights; but let it once be settled and admitted that the House can, by resolution, put a member to the bar for offering to present a petition from slaves, and what is there to prevent the extension of the same interdict to any other subject than slavery? Mr. Bynum's resolutions actually proposed to extend it to petitions from free negroes. Had Mr. Patton's resolutions been adopted—had the House once assumed a censorial power over its members for acts performed in the discharge of their duty—I have no doubts that at the very next session of Congress, the same proscriptive censure would have been applied to all petitions for the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia, and from thence to every other petition, the prayer of which would be displeasing to a party majority in the House, till the right of petition itself, the rod of Aaron in the Ark of your Constitution, would wither into a mere instrument of oppression and revenge, wielded by the hand of faction.

The decision of the House upon the two resolutions last offered by Mr. Patton, proved that a majority of the House were not yet prepared to assume this censorial power over its members; but the proceedings of the House on the subject of this petition, and *all* petitions relating to slavery, did not terminate here. I must ask your further attention and patience for the conclusion of my story, which may conduct you to the close of the session, and possibly

to the inaugural address of the new President of the United States.

JOHN QUINCY ADAMS.

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WASHINGTON, 20th March, 1837.

*To the Inhabitants of the Twelfth Congressional District  
of Massachusetts.*

FELLOW CITIZENS:—In my preceding addresses, I have spread before you the fifteen successive resolutions, the result of the whole combined slave statesmanship of the House of Representatives of the United States, all having one and the same purpose of passing a vote of censure upon me, for asking, in the discharge of my duty as a member, a question of the Speaker.

The two resolutions upon which they had finally forced a vote of the House, by yeas and nays, were rejected, but my question was not answered, and they were aware that it could not be answered, negatively. It had not been, whether the House would receive a petition from slaves, but whether a petition from slaves came within the resolution of the 18th of January. When the resolution declaring that I had trifled with the House was under consideration, one of the most prominent allegations laid to my charge was, that, by asking the question, I had intended indirectly to cast ridicule upon that resolution, and upon the House for adopting it. Nor was this entirely without foundation. I did not intend to cast ridicule upon the House, but to expose the absurdity of that resolution, against which I had protested as unconstitutional and unjust. But the characteristic peculiarity of this charge against me was, that while some of the gentlemen of the South were urging the House to pass a vote of censure upon me, for a distant and conjectural inference of my intention to deride that resolution, others of them, in the same debate, and on the same day, were showering upon the same resolution

direct expressions of unqualified contempt, without even being called to order. Like the saints in Hudibras—

“The saints may do the same thing by  
The Spirit in sincerity,  
Which other men are prompted to,  
And at the devil's instance do ;  
And yet the actions be contrary,  
Just as the saints and wicked vary.”

So it was with the gentlemen of the South. While Mr. Pickens could openly call the resolution of the 18th of January a miserable and contemptible resolution; while Mr. Thompson could say it was fit only to be burnt by the hands of the hangman, without rebuke or reproof,—I was to be censured by the House for casting ridicule upon them, by asking the question whether the resolution included petitions from slaves.

They were dissatisfied with the result of their crusade against me, in the vindictive pursuit of which they had not only forgotten to answer my question, but even to obtain from the House a declaration denying the right of slaves to petition. On Friday morning, several of them were absent from their seats in the House, and mysterious givings out were circulated that a caucus meeting of the South had been held, in which grave proposals had been made that they should secede in a body and go home. This was an old expedient tried before, some years since, and not without some effect upon the simple good nature of the North. Whether it was really brought forward at this time, I cannot absolutely say; but the rumors were, that a first and second meeting were held, at which the opinions expressed were found so discordant, that it was finally concluded to be the wisest course to return to their seats in the House, and negotiate with the free representation for a *reconsideration* of one of the rejected resolutions. The interposition of the President elect of the United States was also said to have been solicited and obtained; and there is authority from his southern adherents for the assurance that it was exercised in a manner altogether satisfactory to them. The sympathies of the whig members from the free states were likewise invoked, by their

opposition associates of the nullification creed, and the Pennsylvania delegation, who, to a man, had been found inaccessible to the censorial resolutions, were now many of them coaxed into a compromise with the dark spirit of slavery, so indignantly and justly characterized by the governor of that commonwealth.

The gentlemen from the South had rung all the changes of their censorial resolutions exclusively among themselves. The peace-offering to their wounded sensibilities was to come entirely from representatives of freemen. The motion for reconsideration of the first rejected resolution of Mr. Patton, was made on Friday evening by Mr. Lane, of Indiana, and carried the next morning by the immediate application of the previous question. Even before this vote of reconsideration, Mr. Taylor, of New York, and Mr. Ingersoll, of Philadelphia, had asked leave of the House to offer resolutions propitiatory to the anxieties and resentments of the gentlemen of the South. The resolution presented by Mr. Taylor deserves special attention, as it may be considered as indicative of the opinions and councils of the present President of the United States; that of Mr. Ingersoll as expressive of the anti-abolition sentiments prevailing at this time in the city of Philadelphia, and less intensely throughout the northern part of the Union. The first of these resolutions was offered by Mr. Taylor, and the second by Mr. Ingersoll, probably in concert with Mr. Thompson, of South Carolina, the mover of the first resolution of censure upon me, and who finally accepted Mr. Ingersoll's resolution as a substitute for his own.

Both the resolutions underwent sundry modifications before they were adopted by the House. That of Mr. Ingersoll was, in its last mutation, reduced to this shape:—

“An inquiry having been made by an honorable gentleman from Massachusetts, whether a paper which he held in his hand, purporting to be a petition from certain slaves, and declaring themselves to be slaves, came within the order of the House of the 13th of January, and the said paper not having been received by the Speaker, he stated that, in a case so extraordinary and novel, he would take the advice and counsel of the House.



*“Resolved, That this House cannot receive said petition without disregarding its own dignity, the rights of a large class of the citizens of the South and West, and the Constitution of the United States.”*

You will remark, that while the preamble recites my inquiry of the Speaker, as the reasons for the resolutions, yet the resolution itself evades answering my inquiry. My question was, whether the petition came within the order of the 18th of January. The answer is, that the House cannot *receive* said petition, &c. It is no answer at all. The Speaker had already decided that two petitions presented by me, and not *received*, were included within the order of the 18th of January; and therefore the fact that the petition from slaves had not been received, afforded no reason for excluding it from the operation of the order of the 18th of January. I moved as an amendment to Mr. Ingersoll's resolution, that the order of the 18th of January should be inserted in it word for word, followed by a declaration that the petition from slaves was not within the order of the House, and I asked him to accept this as a modification of his resolution, which he declined. He said he would give his reasons for declining, if I desired; but he gave none. His resolution was carried by the previous question; but if you will read his resolution, as it would have read with the insertion of the order, you will not need to inquire what his reason was.

The resolution contains the averment of three distinct propositions, declaring that the House could not receive the petition, without disregarding,

1. Its own dignity.
2. The rights of a large class of the citizens of the South and West, and,
3. The Constitution of the United States.

How the House could disregard its dignity by receiving a petition, is beyond my comprehension. The only reason assigned for it, is the condition of the petitioners, because they are slaves. The sentiment, in the bosom of any free American, that one sixth part of his countrymen are, by the accident of their birth, deprived even of the natural right of prayer, is degrading enough to human na-

ture ; but that because, in one portion of this Union, the native American becomes, by descent from African ancestry, an outcast of human nature, classed with the brute creation, within the boundaries of the state in which he was born, therefore, it is beneath the dignity of the General Legislative Assembly of a nation, founding its existence upon the natural and inalienable rights of man, to listen to his prayer, or even to receive his petition, is an opinion to which I trust your judgments will never assent, and a sentiment which your hearts will reject with disgust.

“The *rights* of a large class of the citizens of the South and West,” for the prayer of the petition, was not for, but against the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia. It was the voice of slaves hugging their chains, and praying that they might not be broken. It was impossible that *any* action of the House upon that petition, whether of compliance or of refusal, could in any manner impair any rights of any citizen of the South or of the West.

Nor was Mr. Ingersoll more fortunate in his third avowal, that the House could not *receive* the petition without disregarding the Constitution of the United States. The truth is directly the reverse. It was his resolution that disregarded and trampled under foot the Constitution of the United States, which expressly forbids Congress from abridging, even by *law*, the right of petition, and which, not by the remotest implication, limits that right to freemen. This, fellow-citizens, is a point upon which every one of you can judge for himself. Let him who is not familiarly acquainted with that instrument, read it—let him read and search it, for the article, section, or paragraph, from which so much as a plausible *inference* can be drawn, forbidding either House of Congress from *receiving* a petition from slaves. He will find abundant evidence that the authors of the Constitution considered slavery as one of those vessels of dishonor, which, albeit impairing the purity of our political institutions, could not even be *named* with decency in a compact formed for securing to the people of the Union the blessing of liberty. He will

find that, in every instance where slaves are alluded to, it is always as *persons*, and not as property; that the words *slave* or *slavery* are not found in the whole document; that they are recognized as members of the community, possessing rights even in the provisions depriving them of their exercise and enjoyment; that their right to be represented in Congress is admitted, even in the provision which curtails it by two fifths, and transfers the remainder to their masters; that their right to the protection of the laws, and to the enjoyment of freedom in the free states, is admitted even in the provisions that when *escaping* from the states where they are held to service or labor, they shall be delivered up to their masters. But you will not find one word which expressly, no, not one word which, by rational construction, liberal or strict, deprives them of the right of petition.

This resolution, therefore, far better suited to the meridian of Charleston than to that of Philadelphia, is a worthy companion of the three reported by Mr. H. L. Pinckney, at the first session of the last Congress, and the second of which was repeated by the order of the 18th of January last. Of that order, many of you have manifested your high disapprobation, by petitioning the House to rescind it. But the resolution of Mr. Ingersoll bows the knee yet nearer to prostration before the spirit of slavery. It surrenders the post at which the tottering freedom of the North and Centre had erected a breastwork of defence to the right of petition. The gentlemen of the South had been desperately struggling through two sessions of Congress, for a positive refusal of the House to *receive* any petition for the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia, or in any manner relating to slavery. This refusal to *receive*, they had not been able to carry, till a representative from the city of William Penn, came forward as their volunteer auxiliary. His resolution has set the example of refusing to *receive* petitions, on no better ground than the condition of the petitioners. At the next step in the progress of servility, the same argument will be applied with more plausibility to *the object of the petition*, and the

House will be called to resolve a formal exclusion and refusal to receive any petition relating to slavery or the abolition of slavery—and with the right of petition on this subject, the freedom of speech in the House will be in like manner abridged. That the freedom of the press in this city will share the same fate, you have premonitory symptoms in the pledge already extorted from the National Intelligencer, immediately after the publication of Mr. Slade's letter, containing the argument which he intended to address to the House on the right of slaves to petition, but which was cut off by the previous question.

If this refusal to receive petitions, and to hear deliberative argument upon any question relating to slavery, could be confined to that subject alone, I might have spared myself the reluctant labor, and you the weary perusal of these addresses—but if coming events cast their shadows before them, we shall soon be hurried into the midst of a revolution more formidable than any collision between the co-ordinate departments of the government for patronage, any transitory tampering with the currency, any scramble between rival usurers and stock-jobbers for deposits of the public money, any swindling Indian treaties, or more swindling Indian wars, or any deep dissension between the cotton-gin of the planter and the spinning-jenny of the factory. All these may be compromised—all these may be occasionally used as ladders to power, and ascended or overleaped, according to the shrewdness or the impetuosity of the aspirants, to reach the summit of ambition. On all these lines of separation and opposition between the different portions of the Union, the counteracting impulses of popular leaders may balance each other, and the result is nothing worse than fluctuations of public policy, and perhaps shortened presidential terms. But the conflict of interests, and of principles involved in the jarring elements of freedom and slavery implanted in the physical, moral, intellectual nature of our institutions, must sooner or later come to an issue, and must control the destinies not merely of this nation, but of this hemisphere, and of man upon this planet. The abolition of slavery in the

District of Columbia is but a drop of water to the ocean—but a mite in the mountain laboring with the freedom of man. The convulsive spasm produced in the House of Representatives of the United States, by the mere question whether they would in *any* case receive a petition from slaves, was not occasioned by any galvanism in the question itself—it was the flash of light over the closed eyes of the slaveholder, exhibiting to him his slave petitioning for his freedom. It is said that in the turbulent diets of Poland, before her subjugation, every member of the body possessed the veto power over every act of their legislation. The assemblies were held in open air. The nobles attended them, mounted on coursers fleet as the winds. The right to pronounce the veto was strictly constitutional; but woe to him who pronounced; for from the moment that it issued from his lips, his only safety was in flight. His life was on the speed of his horse. If he did not start as he spoke, his noble associates of the diet rushed upon him instantly, and cut him to pieces. If he fled, they galloped in pursuit, and whoever overtook him, by a stroke of his partisan, severed his head from his body as he flew. This was the remedy for the exercise of a constitutional right in the republican monarchy of Poland. The tiger turn of the gentlemen from the South, upon the member who asked the obnoxious question, was indicative of the same spirit habitually prevalent among the nobles of the Polish diet. Mr. Ingersoll's resolutions partook of the same infusion—no longer vindictive, but still minatory.

Mr. Taylor's resolution was in far more measured, and less questionable terms. It was in these words:—

*“Resolved.* That slaves do not possess the right of petition, secured to the citizens of the United States by the Constitution.”

This resolution was probably prepared by, or after consultation, with the President elect of the United States. It was amply sufficient, so long as a majority of the House of Representatives shall concur in that opinion, to exclude the reception of any petition from slaves; but it was not satisfactory to the gentlemen from the South. Their purpose was to stigmatize the presentation, or, by one of

Speaker Polk's distinctions, the offer to present such petition. The resolution of Mr. Ingersoll *gave color to their idea*, and furnished them with a precedent for the future refusal of *any* petition relating to the abolition of slavery.

Both the resolutions are mere opinions of a majority of the House, reversible at any day when the majority of the House shall entertain a contrary opinion. It is not competent for the House of Representatives to adjudicate what are or are not the rights secured to the citizens of the United States by the Constitution; but if Mr. Taylor's resolution is true, a citizen of the United States, enslaved at Algiers, Tunis, or Tripoli, would possess no right to petition Congress for his redemption, or for any measures to effect it.

The question whether slaves possess the right of petition, is of no practical importance, except as the denial of the right is an abridgment of the right itself. Their masters will take care to keep the redressing of all their grievances in their own hands, and will redress them in their own way. But the resolution that the House cannot *receive* a petition from them, is an abridgment not only of their right of petition, but of the constitutional power of the House; and the precedent of that abridgment of power in one case yields a principle that may be applied in numberless others, till the whole right of petition shall, like the attainment of office, be numbered among the *spoils of victory*—the exclusive possession of the dominant party of the day.

Both the resolutions were adopted by yeas and nays—that of Mr. Ingersoll, by a vote of 160 to 35; that of Mr. Taylor, by 162 to 18.

The vote of the House, on both the resolutions, indicates, with much precision, the *temper of the House* upon the subject of the abolition of slavery. I believe further, that the comparative numbers on both sides fairly represented the numbers, as well as the opinions of the constituent body, the people of the United States. I have no reason to think there was one member of the House who

would have voted for the immediate abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia. The majority were very averse to receiving any petitions for that object; nor was there opportunity afforded me of presenting any more, of the multitudes which I received and was requested to present. On Monday, the 13th of February, the order of receiving petitions was reversed; commencing with the territories, and proceeding from South to North; and upon the state of Massachusetts being called, the House adjourned at the motion of Mr. Cave Johnson, a Van Buren member, from Tennessee. On the 20th and 27th of February, days when, by the rules of the House, petitions should have been received, the rules were suspended to give preference to other business. In the mean time, an average of eight or ten petitions every day, were coming to me, with requests that I would present them. On the last day of the session, I had two hundred of them in my hands, from the states of Massachusetts, Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, and North Carolina. It had been customary to allow members having petitions, which they had not had the opportunity to present, to leave them, at the close of the session, with the clerk, and they were entered upon the journals. This the Speaker now declined to allow, without a special order of the House. Mr. Lawrence, who had also a number of petitions to present, moved for such an order; but objection was made to the reception of his resolution, and the presentation of several hundreds of petitions was suppressed; and, among the rest, several relating to subjects in no wise connected with slavery or its abolition. Sons of the Plymouth Pilgrims! I have given you a statement, faithful and accurate, of the condition of your right of petition, in the House of Representatives of the United States, at the close of the twenty-fourth Congress. In the Senate, the same right was equally prostrated, though with less resistance, and by the means of other forms.

Since then, the inauguration of Mr. Van Buren has placed a new chief magistrate at the head of this Union. To those of you who have petitioned for the abolition of

slavery in the District of Columbia, it cannot be indifferent to learn that the only specific point of policy upon which he has thought proper to pledge the conduct of his administration in advance, is the denial of that very measure. He declares that, even if a bill for abolishing slavery in the District of Columbia should obtain the sanction of a majority in both Houses of Congress, he would oppose to its enactment his constitutional negative. If this declaration means no more than it imports, there is little prospect that its sincerity or the firmness of his adhesion to its principle will ever be put to the test. There is not the remotest prospect, that, within the term of his administration, a majority of either, much less of both Houses of Congress, will be found prepared to vote for that measure; and if so great a change in the public mind should be effected, as would produce majorities of both Houses in favor of abolition, it will not be within the efficacy of his veto to resist the course of the torrent. But if, as there is reason to apprehend, this premise is intended as a pledge, that the whole influence, official and personal, of the President of the United States shall be applied to sustain and perpetuate the institution of domestic slavery, it is a melancholy prognostic of a new system of administration, of which the dearest interests of New England will be the first victims, and of which the ultimate result can be no other than the dissolution of the Union.

*Slavery* has already had too deep and too baleful an influence upon the affairs and upon the history of this Union. It can never operate but as a slow poison to the *morals* of any community infected with it. Ours is infected with it to the vitals. We are told that the national government has no right to interfere with the institution of domestic slavery in the states, *in any manner*. What right, then, has domestic slavery to interfere in any manner with the national government? What right has slavery to interfere in the free states with the dearest institutions of their freedom? with the right of habeas corpus? with the right of trial by jury? with the freedom of the press? with the freedom of speech? with the sacred privacy of cor-



respondence by the mail? What right has slavery to interfere with the laws of other nations productive of freedom? What right to interfere with the laws of Bermuda? of the Bahama Islands? of Great Britain? What right has she to cast her living chattels upon a soil which has banished her forever, and then come whining to the national government that the touch of the soil of liberty has quickened her chattels into freemen; and requiring of the national government to claim indemnity for her emancipated chattels. Nay, more and worse—what right has slavery to chide the national government for not demanding her indemnity in a tone sufficiently peremptory? for not threatening Great Britain with war, if she lingers longer to pay the price of sinews bought and sold?

If the national government has no right to interfere with the institution of domestic slavery in the states, *in any manner*, what right has domestic slavery to issue from her consecrated boundaries, and call on the national government for protection, for defence, for vindication of her pretended and polluted rights? What right has she to show her face upon the ocean, where the laws of the nation have pronounced her detested traffic PIRACY? The independence of sovereign states, from all foreign interference with their municipal institutions, is reciprocal, or it is nothing. If you have no right to interfere with the slavery of South Carolina, the slavery of South Carolina has no right to interfere with your freedom.

If the national government has no right to interfere with the institution of domestic slavery in any of the states, what right has that same government to hang on your neck the millstone of Texian slavery?—reinstated slavery, in a land where once that curse of God had been extinguished?—slavery restored by fraud and treachery, and the imposture of a painted harlot, usurping the name of freedom? Is the annexation of Texas, with her execrable load of *eternal* slavery, to the Union—is that one of the engagements implied in Mr. Van Buren's pledge never to sign a bill for the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia? If the pledge of the inaugural address

means any thing more than soothing sound, it means that the maintenance and perpetuation of slavery in this Union, shall be the cardinal point, the polar star, of Mr. Van Buren's administration. And with that pledge, can you doubt that the manacles of Texian slavery will be fastened upon your hands, and the fetters of Texian slavery upon your feet?—Children of Carver, and Bradford, and Winslow, and Alden!—the pen drops from my hand!

JOHN QUINCY ADAMS.

SPEECH OF JOHN QUINCY ADAMS,  
OF MASSACHUSETTS,

IN THE U. S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,

FEBRUARY 9, 1837,

*On the Resolutions to censure him for inquiring of the Speaker, whether a paper purporting to be from Slaves, came within the order of the House, which laid on the table all petitions relating to Slavery.*

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[Reported by the Editor of the Boston Daily Advocate.]

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MR. SPEAKER :—I shall endeavor to occupy as little of the time of this House as possible, in what I am about to say; and shall forbear to introduce into my remarks a great deal I had intended to say, should I be permitted to speak in my defence. I wish to bring back the House to the only question really before it; and that is, the question I propounded to the Speaker, and which he put to the House last Monday, whether a paper, which I held in my hand, purporting to come from slaves, was within the resolution of this House, laying on the table all petitions, resolutions and papers relating to the subject of slavery. On that inquiry, no question has been taken by the House. I am anxious that question should be taken by yeas and nays, whether this House, under any circumstances, will receive a petition from slaves.

When I made that inquiry, a member from Georgia (Mr. Haynes) said he could not tell in what manner to meet a proposition of this kind. It might be giving it more importance than it deserved, to notice it at all. Well, sir, if it was deserving of no attention, why did not the House

vote directly on the proposition of the Speaker, yea or nay, whether that paper came within the resolution of the House? Instead of that, the House has been occupied four days, by the attempts of gentlemen to censure me for doing what I did not attempt to do.—Now, sir, I did not present that paper to the House. I knew it was a question that demanded deliberation. I knew it would receive deep attention from this House, from this nation, and from the civilized world. I was prepared to submit to any decision the House might take upon it, but I was desirous that the House should take a direct vote upon it, and that the vote should remain a record for all time. But I was aware that it opened the whole question of the condition of slavery in this country, and the whole extent of the rights and privileges of members of this House, in the exercise of the liberty of speech. That freedom of speech is, I trust, to one portion of the House, still dear. Of another portion, I cannot say, from what I have seen and heard within these four days, that I entertain that hope. I say I was aware that the answer to my question opened the whole subject of the condition of slaves, and the right of speech of members of this House. Well, sir, *has this question been considered?* Of all the gentlemen who, for three days, have consumed the time of this House upon the succession of resolutions of censure upon me for asking that question, one gentleman only, (Mr. French, of Kentucky,) who has filled a judicial station, gave us what he thought a sound constitutional argument, to show that this House ought not to receive petitions from slaves under any circumstances. The argument of that gentleman was able; but if the rejection of the petition depends on that argument, those who vote with him must recur to other arguments to sustain their course. What was his argument? It was, that, if you abolish slavery in the states of this Union, by taking away a portion of the representation in slave states, you violate the Constitution. Now, I ask for the chain or connection between the premises and the conclusion. Is that the gentleman's logic, that, if you abolish slavery, you take away a portion of the

right of representation, secured by the Constitution, and *therefore* the slave has no right to petition?

[Mr. FRENCH rose and explained, not materially varying the proposition.]

Mr. ADAMS. Has the gentleman connected his premises and conclusion any better than before? Suppose, for a moment, that slavery were abolished; how would it follow that the slave states would lose any portion of their representation? Would not the consequence be directly the reverse, and increase, instead of diminishing, their representation? If slavery were abolished in the states, those who are now represented as slaves, would form a part of the whole number of free persons, and would be represented as such. But suppose, for argument sake, that the abolition of slavery *should* reduce the proportional representation of the slave states. What has my question to do with the abolition of slavery in the states? My question was, whether a petition from slaves came within the order of the 18th of January, that *all* memorials, resolutions, petitions, and *papers*, relating, in any manner, to slavery or the slave trade, should, without being printed or referred, be laid on the table, and no further action of the House should be had thereon. The order made no discrimination of persons, from whom the petitions or papers should come. It included *all* petitions—*all* papers. The paper that I held was a petition—it was a *paper*. It came rigidly within the letter of the order—and what was there to exclude it from its spirit? It was to be laid on the table without reading, without printing, without being referred, without further action upon it by the House. Why should it not come under that order? It came from slaves? There was nothing in that order excluding petitions from slaves. There is not a word in the Constitution of the United States excluding petitions from slaves. Suppose the abolition of slavery *should* reduce the representation of the slave states; does that prove that, without the abolition of slavery, the slave shall not be permitted to cry for mercy? to plead for pardon? to utter the shriek of perishing nature for relief? The gentleman argued upon

a question entirely different from that put by the Speaker to the House, and which I yet hope the House will answer, whether, under *any* circumstances, they will receive a petition from slaves?

I beg leave to explain my views of the argument on the right of petition. One of my colleagues (Mr. Cushing) has justly said, that the right of petition is not a right derived from the Constitution, but a preëxisting right of man, secured by a direct prohibition in the Constitution to Congress to pass any law to impair or abridge it. Sir, the framers of the Constitution would have repudiated the idea that they were giving to the people the right of petition. No, sir. That right God gave to the whole human race, when he made them *men*,—the right of prayer, by asking a favor of another. My doctrine is, that this right belongs to humanity,—that the right of petition is the right of prayer, not depending on the condition of the petitioner; and I say, if you attempt to fix any limit to it, you lay the foundation for restriction to any extent that the madness of party spirit may carry it. This is my belief, and if the House decide that the paper I have described comes within the resolution, I will present it, and, in so doing, shall feel that I am performing a solemn duty.

What, sir! place the right of petition on the character and condition of the petitioner, or base it upon a mere political privilege! Such a decision would present this country to all the civilized world as more despotic than the worst of barbarian nations. The sultan of Turkey cannot walk the streets of Constantinople and refuse to receive a petition from the vilest slave, who stands to meet him as he passes by. The right of petition contests no power; it admits the power. It is supplication; it is prayer; it is the cry of distress, asking for relief; and, sir, sad will be the day when it is entered on the Journals of this House, that we will, under no circumstances, receive the petition of slaves. When you begin to limit the right, where shall it stop? The gentleman on my left (Mr. Patton, of Virginia) objected to another petition, which I did present, from women of Fredericksburg, because it

came from free colored people. 'That was giving *color to an idea* with a vengeance!\*' But the gentleman went further, and made the objection that I had presented a petition from women of infamous character—prostitutes, I think he called them.

[Mr. FULTON rose to explain. It was not so. When the gentleman presented that petition, which I knew came from mulattoes in a slave state, I meant to confine my objection to petitions of mulattoes or free negroes in the Southern States. I meant to rescue the ladies of Fredericksburg from the stigma of having signed such a petition. Sir, no lady in Fredericksburg would sign such a petition.]

Mr. ADAMS. With respect to the question what female is entitled to the character of a lady, and what not, I should be sorry to enter into a discussion here. I have never made it a condition of my presenting a petition here, from females, that they should all be ladies, though, sir, I have presented petitions for the abolition of slavery in this District, from ladies as eminently entitled to be called such, as the highest aristocrats in the land. When I have presented these petitions, I have usually said they were from *women*, and that, to my heart, is a dearer appellation than *ladies*.

But, sir, I recur to my first position—that when you establish the doctrine that a slave shall not petition because he is a slave, that he shall not be permitted to raise the cry for mercy, you let in a principle subversive of every foundation of liberty, and you cannot tell where it will stop. The next step will be that the character, and not the claims, of petitioners will be the matter to be discussed on this floor; and whenever, as in the case of the gentleman from Virginia, (Mr. Patton,) any member finds a name on a petition which belongs to a person whom he says he knows to be of bad character, a motion will be made not to receive the petition, or to return it to the member who offered it. The gentleman from Virginia (Mr. Patton)

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\* One of the resolutions proposed to censure Mr. Adams for having attempted to *give color to the idea* that slaves had a right to petition!

says he knows these women, and that they are infamous. *How* does the gentleman know it? [A laugh.]

[Mr. PATTON. I did not say that I knew the women, personally. I knew from others that the character of one of them was notoriously bad.]

Mr. ADAMS. I am glad the gentleman now says he does not know these women, for if he had not disclaimed that knowledge, I might have asked *who* it was that made these women infamous,—whether it was those of their own color or their masters. I have understood that there are those among the colored population of slaveholding states, who bear the image of their masters. [Great sensation.]

Mr. GLASCOCK, of Georgia, here went across the hall to the seat of Mr. Adams, and, amidst cries of “Order,” held up to him the petition of the women of Fredericksburg, and said, “Is not that your hand-writing, endorsed ‘From ladies of Fredericksburg’?”

Mr. ADAMS. Mr. Speaker, I did not designate them as ladies when I presented the petition. That is my hand-writing; but when I endorsed it, and sent it to the table, I did not know or suspect that the petitioners were colored people.

Here, then, is another limitation to the right of petition. First, it is denied to slaves, then to free persons of color, and then to persons of notoriously bad character. Now, sir, if you begin by limiting this right as to slaves, you next limit it as to all persons of color, and then you go into inquiries as to the character of petitioners before you will receive petitions. There is but one step more, and that is to inquire into the political faith of petitioners. Each side will represent their opponents as being infamous; and what becomes of the right of petition? Where and how will the right of petition exist at all, if you put it on these grounds?

A gentleman from Virginia, (Mr. Robertson,) to whose candor and generosity on this occasion I offer my tribute of thanks, as it contrasts with the treatment I experience from others,—though disapproving, in the strongest terms, the pertinacity of zeal which I have so often manifested



in behalf of this right of petition,—is unwilling to pass a vote of formal censure upon me, because he sees how manifestly incompatible that would be with *any* freedom of speech in this House. He says—and he is a distinguished lawyer—that there can be no right to petition, where there is no power to grant the prayer. This is ingenious and plausible; but that gentleman, even whose disapprobation is more painful to me than would be the formal censure of others, might excuse me, if I cannot assent to the correctness of his argument. The want of power to grant the prayer of a petition is a very sufficient reason for rejecting that prayer, but it cannot impair the right of the petitioner to pray.

The question of power applies to the authority to grant the petition, but not to the right of the petitioner to present his petition. The power to grant it is often one of the most mooted questions in the world. In relation to this very matter of slavery, the power to grant the prayer of those who ask for its abolition in the District of Columbia, is the question that divides this House. Ask the gentlemen from slaveholding states, in this House, whether Congress has that power. Not one of them will say they have.

[Mr. GRAVES, of Kentucky, who was sitting near Mr. Adams, and who had declared, in this debate, that he held Congress had that power, reminded him of the fact.]

Mr. ADAMS. Yes, one gentleman from Kentucky has affirmed that Congress has the power to abolish slavery in this District, but very few from slaveholding states will say so; and I do not know what it may cost that gentleman for having uttered such an opinion on this floor. Ask two of the representatives from Maine, ask the members from Vermont, from Massachusetts, from Rhode Island, from Connecticut, from—no, I will not go to New Hampshire nor New York, until I see how they vote on the question before the House. Ask the representatives of none but freemen on this floor, and their answer will be that Congress has the power.

The ground of the gentleman from Virginia, who denies the right of petition without the power to grant, is

perfectly consistent with his doctrine that Congress has no power to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia; but, sir, that is not the opinion of this House, and this House is anti-abolition, by an overwhelming majority. I am so myself; but, upon the single question of the power of Congress to abolish slavery within the District, there is a great majority of this House in favor of the power.

The gentleman from Virginia (Mr. Robertson) believes that Congress has no such power, and here he denies the right of petition for the exercise of a power which Congress does not possess. Well, sir, for the sake of the argument, I might grant him his premises, and then deny his conclusion. It would reduce the right of petition to nothing more than the right of the predominant party, for the time being, to petition. It would exclude all petitions from those who held with a minority in Congress, as to the right to exercise any given power; and the right of petition would be hedged in, until it would be reduced to a mere nullity as to its essential characteristic—a supplication from one man in distress to another, who, he believes, has the power to relieve him. I wish it was in my power to illustrate this principle further, without taking up more of the time of the House than I intend to do; but I forbear. This, sir, is the ground of my doctrine—that the right of petition cannot be limited, by any act of this House, so as to deny the right to supplicate to the slave.

In the course of the argument on the right of petition, I should say *debate*, sir, during three days, the real question before the House has been changed to an almost countless series of resolutions, bearing down upon me, all intended, directly or indirectly, to censure me for asking a question of the Speaker, which he referred to the House, and which the House has not yet answered. I will not go through a detail of all these resolutions, with which gentlemen from the South pounced down upon me like so many eagles upon a dove. I make no account of the cries heard all around, when I asked that question, “Expel him, expel him!” They are not in the resolutions. The first resolution to censure me came from the gentleman from Georgia, (Mr. Haynes.) That was not strong enough,

and was followed by one more bitter, from the gentleman from South Carolina, (Mr. Waddy Thompson.) Even that was thought too mild for my offence, and was followed by a *modification* from the gentleman from Alabama, (Mr. Lewis,) which the gentleman from South Carolina accepted. I will not enumerate the rest, as they were showered upon me in quick succession, all reminding me of the exclamation of Dame Quickly,

“O! day and night, but these are bitter words!”

But, in the midst of the exultation of the gentlemen,—for they seemed sure of two thirds of the House to carry any thing they chose to propose,—I was under the necessity of rising, as soon as I could get the floor, and asking the gentlemen, before they brought me as a culprit to the bar to be censured, to amend their resolution, and make it conform to the facts, about which they had not thought it worth while, in their very great zeal to put me down, to inquire at all. Well, instead of admitting their error into which they had run, without a word from me to justify it, the gentlemen took advantage of my explanation of the nature of the paper purporting to come from slaves, and pounced upon me with another resolution, charging me with the high crime and misdemeanor of their own false construction of the contents of the paper, which they assumed to be a petition from slaves for abolition, and that I had *permitted* the House to believe it was true! So I was to be gravely censured for gentlemen believing what they had no right to believe, nor even to infer, and what I had never said one word to justify them in believing! But it was soon found that this would not do, and another proposition came from the gentleman from Georgia, which answered the purpose no better, and which he was obliged to withdraw. There came another resolution, from the honorable gentleman from Virginia, (Mr. Dromgoole,) charging a new crime of most alarming import, and that was, that I had “*given color to an idea!*” [Laugh.] I will not say a word upon that charge in the indictment against me. The gentleman from Maine (Mr. Evans) has so keenly exposed it to the ridicule it deserves, that

those who introduced it cannot desire to hear any thing more said upon that subject.

Sir, there was, for once in this House, a remarkable unanimity between gentlemen found in opposition to each other on all other questions. A gentleman, whose speeches on this floor have not caused him to be regarded as the most devoted friend of this administration, (Mr. Waddy Thompson, of South Carolina,) proposed his resolution of censure. A devoted friend of the administration (Mr. Dromgoole, of Virginia) proposed an amendment which the gentleman from South Carolina accepted at once, and that was to censure me for giving color to an idea! Sir, it was in vain that I rose, and gave the gentlemen the sober advice to attend a little more to their facts. The moment I attempted to explain, and set aside all their assumed facts, whisk! there came another resolution of censure, charging me with trifling with the House. It was not what I did, but what I did *not* do.

I did not get up soon enough, it seems, to show these gentlemen the best way to censure me, and enable them to correct their resolutions, which they had brought forward with such zeal and in such rapid succession, but in which, unfortunately for them, there was not one word of truth.

When I say there was not one word of truth in the resolutions of the gentlemen from South Carolina and Alabama, I do not call in question their veracity. There are no men in whose veracity I would sooner trust my whole life; but I tell them that, when they undertake to charge a member of this House, who never gave them the slightest cause of offence, with crimes that should draw down upon him the censure of this body, without first ascertaining the facts, they have stepped beyond the bounds of discretion and propriety; and I will give them one word of advice,—that, when they draw up resolutions to censure me, they should first be careful to pay a little attention to facts.

[This allusion brought Mr. Lewis and Mr. Thompson both on their feet. Mr. LEWIS, of Alabama, said that he came into the House in the midst of the excitement, and, on inquiry, was told that the gentleman from Massachu-

setts, Mr. Adams, had attempted to present a petition from slaves. He took it for granted it was a petition for abolition, and it was full two hours before he understood that it was of a different character. Had he known the object of the petition, he should not have offered the resolution.]

MR. ADAMS. Sir, I very readily admit the explanation of the gentleman. He took for granted what happened not to be true. But I do not intend the slightest disrespect to the gentlemen. I only take the occasion to give them a little advice, the advice of an old man to ardent young men, to govern their future conduct in this House, when they undertake to censure their colleagues. But I want another explanation from the gentleman from South Carolina, (Mr. Waddy Thompson,) and I want to know if the language I find here reported in the *Intelligencer* as his, is really the expression of his deliberate opinion. [Mr. Thompson rose to explain.]

MR. ADAMS. I shall want an explanation of another matter from the gentleman, and he may explain both when I have stated it fully. I read from the report of that gentleman's remarks in the *National Intelligencer*:—

“Does the gentleman, even in the latitude which he gives to the right of petition, think that it includes slaves? If he does not, he has wilfully violated the rules of the House, and the feelings of its members.”

[Mr. Thompson was on his legs again to explain.—MR. ADAMS. I have not done yet. There is more of it to come.—He then continued reading—]

“Does that gentleman know, that there are laws in all the slave states, and here, for the punishment of those who excite insurrection? I can tell him that there are such things as *Grand Juries*; and if, sir, the juries of this District have, as I doubt not they have, proper intelligence and spirit, he may yet be made amenable to *another tribunal*, and we may yet see an incendiary brought to condign punishment.”\*

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\* The above report is known to have been written by Mr. Thompson himself, but the last clause of the quotation is not correctly reported. The precise language of Mr. Thompson was—“It is a violation of the criminal law of this District. What is the difference between presenting the petitions of slaves to be emancipated, and aiding them to escape? My life on it, if the gentleman has the courage to carry it thus far, and will present that petition—my life on it, we shall yet see him within the walls of a penitentiary!”—*Reporter*.

[Mr. WADDY THOMPSON was now permitted to explain. He stated he had thought there was not a human being who believed that slaves had a right to petition, until he heard, with astonishment, that gentleman avow that he held that slaves had a right to petition. As to the other portion of what the gentleman had read, at the time the remark was made, he (Mr. T.) understood that the paper the gentleman called the attention of the House to, was a petition from slaves for the abolition of slavery. I did characterize it as an incendiary act, the presenting of such a petition; and any person, in my judgment as a lawyer, is amenable to the laws, who will present a petition from slaves for the abolition of slavery. Had I known the character of the petition, I certainly should not have made those remarks. I take the responsibility, personally and direct, of every one of those epithets, so far as they apply to a petition from slaves for the abolition of slavery. I do not now apply it to the gentleman from Massachusetts.]

Mr. ADAMS. The House may take the explanation of the gentleman as they please. There, sir, stands the sentiment—there is the printed language, in which the gentleman threatened me with indictment by a grand jury of the District, as a felon and an incendiary, *for words spoken in this House!* The gentleman has again avowed it, and declares that, if the petition had been for abolition, and I had presented it, he would not only have brought me to the bar to be censured by this House, or have voted to expel me, but he would have invoked upon my head the vengeance of the grand jury of this District! Yes, sir, he would make a member of this House, for words spoken in this House, amenable to the grand and petit juries of the District of Columbia! Sir, the only answer I make to such a threat from that gentleman, is to invite him, when he returns home to his constituents, to *study a little the first principles of civil liberty!* That gentleman appears here the representative of slaveholders; and I should like to be informed, how many there are of such representatives on this floor, who

endorse that sentiment. ["I do not," exclaimed Mr. UNDERWOOD, of Kentucky. "I do not," was heard from several other voices.] Is it to be tolerated, that, for any thing a member says on this floor, though it were blasphemy or treason, he is to be held accountable and punished by a grand and petit jury of the District, and not by this House? If that is the doctrine of the slaveholding representatives on this floor, let it, in God's name, go forth, and let us see what the people of this nation think of such a sentiment, and of those who make such an avowal.

Mr. WISE, of Virginia, rose.—Does any man say he will endorse that sentiment for the South?

Mr. ADAMS. I only say, let those of the South who will endorse it, avow it. I want the country should know who they are.

Mr. WISE. I will *not* endorse it. If I believed that the members of this House were amenable in any way, as such, to the juries of this District, I would not hold a seat here for one moment. Sir, this petty tribunal of the District, to which, it is suggested, the people of the United States, in the persons of their representatives, are to be held amenable, is notoriously under the dictation of the President, and is selected by an officer of his appointment. Have we not seen the Executive dictating to the Senate and to this House, and calling upon members to purge themselves of contempt?

[Mr. WADDY THOMPSON was brought up again. He referred, he said, to the laws of South Carolina, and, by those laws, if any member of the Legislature should present a petition from slaves, he would be liable to indictment by a grand jury.]

Mr. ADAMS. That may do for a Southern Legislature, to help out the gentleman; and if it is the law of South Carolina, that the members of her Legislature are held amenable to petit and grand juries, for words spoken in debate, God Almighty receive my thanks that I am not a citizen of South Carolina! [Great sensation. Mr. Pickens, of South Carolina, rose, apparently to explain this subject.]

Mr. ADAMS, (waving his hand.) I cannot yield the floor to that gentleman. Sir, in Great Britain, which we call a monarchy, the legislative body corresponding to this House—the Commons—cannot elect their Speaker without the approbation of the King. Suppose, sir, a member of this House should propose to send a message to the President for his approval of our choice of a Speaker. What would be the opinion of that act, by the slaveholding representatives themselves? Then would be the time, if ever, to send the member who should make such a proposition, to the grand jury.

Well, sir, the first act of the Speaker chosen by the British Commons, subject to the approval of the King, is to demand of the King freedom of speech for the Commons, and the King never sends them to the grand juries of Westminster to settle it.

I will not take up the time of the House on this point, but I cannot express the amazement with which such a doctrine, such a threat, will be regarded when it shall go forth in this debate to all the non-slaveholding states—amazement that, the moment it was uttered, it was not instantly rebuked by the Speaker from the Chair. Sir, if I ever could bring my mind to censure a member of this House for any language uttered here, I can conceive of nothing more deserving it, than such a real, gross contempt of the House as this. What, sir! the members of this House, the representatives of this whole nation, answerable to a grand jury of this District for words spoken in this House! The members from New England, from New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and the free Western States, amenable to grand juries of the District of Columbia for their acts as representatives! liable to be tried as felons, and punished as incendiaries, for presenting, or "*giving color to the idea*" that they may present, petitions not exactly agreeable to certain gentlemen from the South! Sir, if that is the condition upon which we hold our seats here, and exercise our functions as the representatives of our constituents, the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. Wise) has anticipated me in what I had



to say ; and that is, that, if grand juries, constituted as they will be here, if they are to be made the avengers of whatever may be said or done in this House, how long will it be before the gentleman from South Carolina himself (Mr. Waddy Thompson) will have to answer before a grand and petit jury of the District, as an incendiary, for words spoken here against the Executive ! And I ask him with what firmness or freedom he could resist executive power, if, for every word he utters, he is to be held amenable to a grand jury selected by the marshal, an officer appointed by the President ? Let that gentleman, let every member of this House, ask his own heart, with what confidence, with what boldness, with what freedom, with what firmness, he would give utterance to his opinions on this floor, if, for every word, for a mere question asked of the Speaker, involving a question belonging to human freedom, to the rights of man, he was liable to be tried as a felon or an incendiary, and sent to the penitentiary ! And this jury, selected by an officer of the President, are to be the supreme judges of the sovereign American people, in the persons of their representatives ! Such is the avowed doctrine of the gentleman from South Carolina ; such are his notions of freedom of speech and of civil liberty !

I have dwelt long on this topic, and will abridge what I had to say of other matters brought into this debate. I might, perhaps, have been willing to have had the yeas and nays taken on this resolution to censure me, without saying one word ; but it was impossible for me to remain silent without calling on the House to mark and repel this sentiment avowed by the gentleman from South Carolina. I could not pass over such a sentiment uttered on this floor, and not, as it ought to have been, at once put down by the Speaker.

Sir, I do not know how far the southern gentlemen will endorse that sentiment. Probably I never shall know. What I have said, and more than I have time to say, has been called for by an imperative sense of duty, as I regard it, when such a threat as this has been uttered, though by but a single member of this House.

Did the gentleman think he could frighten me from my purpose by his threat of a grand jury? If that was his object, let me tell him, *he mistook his man*. I am not to be frightened from the discharge of a duty by the indignation of the gentleman from South Carolina, nor by all the grand juries in the universe. The right by which the national representative holds his seat here, is of vital importance, and, that it may be understood, I hope that this debate will go forth and be read by the whole people, and that, among other remarkable things, they will *mark* this *threat* of the gentleman from South Carolina.

Sir, we have heard much of the great superiority of Anglo-Saxon blood. Is there a man living, with a drop of that blood in his veins, who will subscribe to this doctrine of the member from South Carolina? Are these the principles of freedom by which to regulate the deliberations of a legislative assembly? I ask any member of this House what he thinks would be the issue, if a member of the British House of Commons should rise in his place, and tell another member that, for words spoken there, he should be held amenable to a grand jury of Westminster. Sir, it would be considered too ridiculous for indignation: it would be received with one universal shout of laughter, and from thenceforth subject the author of such a measure to be held up

“ *Sacred* to ridicule his whole life long,  
And the *sad* burden of some *merry* song.”\*

[Laughter.] Arraigned, as I have been, Mr. Speaker, on such a variety of charges, changing their ground in such rapid succession, it has been impossible to make my defence with any system or order. All that I say is unavoidably desultory. Whenever my accusers presented *the color of an idea*, before I could fix it, it was gone, and other ideas of other colors presented in its stead. The gentlemen have performed their parts here like those persons known in theatrical companies by the name of

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\* Mr. Thompson is a violent opposition member, and vehement in his denunciations of the President.—*Reporter*.

actors of all work, who assume many characters in the same play, and change their dresses so often, that you never know it is the same actor that comes in, in so many different parts, all so unlike. So has it been in the rapid changes of the gentlemen, who, in a variety of characters, have arraigned me as a criminal to be brought to the bar, on the charge of gross contempt, for "*giving color to an idea!*" How can I reply to such a charge, or how defend myself against the allegation of such a crime? Such are the attempts made to bring down upon my head the indignation and censure of this House; a calamity, sir, which I should regard as the heaviest misfortune of a long life, checkered as it has been by many and severe vicissitudes. Yes, sir, I avow, that, if a vote of censure should pass upon my name, for any act of mine in this House, it would be the heaviest of all calamities that have ever befallen me.

Sir, am I guilty, have I ever been guilty, of contempt to this House? Have I not guarded the honor of this House as a cherished sentiment of my heart? Have I not respected this House as the representatives of the whole people of the whole Union? Have I ever been regardless of the great representative principle of the people, here exhibited? Have I ever been wanting, as a member of this body, in a proper *esprit du corps*? Have I not defended the honor of this House on more than one occasion? Was I not the first, on a former occasion, to vindicate members of this House from the charge of being susceptible to bribery and corruption—a charge coming from one to whom the majority were most devoted? Have I not defended this House from charges from another quarter, to which I wish no further to allude? \* And am I now to be censured for doing what I have not done, or for not doing what I did not do, under pretence of a contempt of this House, in an act which was done from motives of the highest possible respect to this House? for never, in any act of my life, did

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\* Referring, it is presumed, to the able defence Mr. A. made, the last session, against the attacks of Mr. Webster on the majority of the House for voting the three millions appropriation, on the French question.—*Reporter*.

I more consult the respect due to this House, than in proposing the question I put to the Speaker, touching that paper from slaves.

Sir, if he be an enemy who shall succeed in bringing down upon me, directly or indirectly, the censure of this House—I say, if he be an enemy who votes for this, let him know he has his revenge, his triumph; for a heavier calamity could never fall upon me on earth!

And this brings me to the resolutions before the House.\* I object to the first resolution (offered by Mr. Patton, of Virginia) because it does not meet and answer my question. Let the question be put by yeas and nays, and I am willing to record my *yea* that it is the duty of the House to receive petitions from slaves; and I shall regard it as of high import to free institutions, if, on full deliberation, the House *refuse* to say that they will receive petitions from slaves. The resolution does not say whether they will or not. That question, and the only question really before the House, is not met. We do not know whether it is proper or not to present such petitions. But suppose it is *not* proper. Can there be any offence, before the House have settled or considered that question, for a member respectfully to ask whether it be proper? Now, sir, this question is not met, and that is my objection to the first resolution.

The second resolution touches neither my question nor me, but pounces on an ideal man. It says, "Every mem-

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\* The resolutions were as follows:—

"*Resolved*, That the right of petition does not belong to slaves of this Union; that no petition from them can be presented to this House, without derogating from the rights of the slaveholding states, and endangering the integrity of the Union.

"*Resolved*, That every member, who shall hereafter present any such petitions to this House, ought to be considered as regardless of the feelings of this House, the rights of the South, and an enemy to the Union.

"*Resolved*, That, the Hon. John Quincy Adams having solemnly disclaimed a design of doing any thing disrespectful to the House, in the inquiry he made of the Speaker, as to the right of petition purporting to be from slaves, and having avowed his intention not to offer to present the petition, if the House was of opinion that it ought not to be presented,—therefore all further proceedings as to his conduct now cease."

ber who shall *hereafter* present such petition ought to be considered an enemy to the Union," &c. What is that, sir, but the same threat, indirectly made, which the member from South Carolina (Mr. Waddy Thompson) directly made, of sending the man who should present such a petition, to the grand jury of the District of Columbia? This resolution declares that the member who shall hereafter make an attempt to present any such petition, shall be held *infamous*. Is this another maxim of the slaveholding representatives, touching the freedom of speech in this House? Sir, if that resolution passes, I will submit to it so far as not to present any petitions of slaves, but I shall consider it as a resolution most disgraceful and dishonorable to this House. What, sir! is any member of this House to be pronounced infamous for offering to aid human misery so far as to present its cry for mercy and relief to this House?

But, sir, not only would such a resolution dishonor this body in the eyes of the whole civilized world, it would also limit the rights and the liberties of members of this House, so as, in fact, to surrender them all. If, sir, you can get a vote to pronounce a member infamous who shall hereafter present a petition from slaves, you have but one step further to take, and that will be easy in the rage of the spirit of party; you will declare that every man shall be held infamous if he proposes any thing displeasing to the majority.

As to the third resolution, I ask of the justice of the House not to go for it. It indirectly does what the other resolutions of censure did directly. It says that no further proceedings shall be had against me, because I have disclaimed disrespect, and disavowed an intention which no one had the shadow of a right to impute to me. What is this but saying that, if I had not disclaimed and disavowed, I should have been censured and punished by an *ex post facto* law? but that, having done so, having in fact pleaded guilty, therefore, out of pure kindness, they will forgive me! Forgive me, sir, for what? For violating the rules of this House, for contempt

of this House? No, sir. Had I done so, the Speaker should have called me to order, and rebuked me on the instant. And suppose, sir, for a moment, it was a violation of any rule for me to put the question I did to the Speaker, concerning that paper, and this is the offence for which I am to be forgiven,—how stands the case of the Speaker himself, who put that very question to the House? I don't see but that, if I am to be indicted by a grand jury, the Speaker must be indicted with me, for aiding and abetting. I did but ask the question of the Speaker; he asked it of the House; and if there was contempt or crime in either case, which was the greater?

Sir, I am content that this whole debate should go forth as it has been begun in the *National Intelligencer*. I am willing that my constituents, the people of this nation, the world, and all after times, should judge of me and my action on this great moral question. And here I say, that I have not done one single thing I would not do again, under like circumstances; not one thing have I done that I have not done under the highest and most solemn sense of duty.

But it is said that I have trifled with the House. That I deny. I have disclaimed, I again disclaim, any such intention. No, sir, I had a higher purpose than trifling with this House; and, having disclaimed such intention, no man has a right to charge me with it. Sir, I never acted under a more solemn sense of duty; I never was more serious in any moment of my life. I take it, therefore, that the last resolution, excusing and forgiving me, will not pass. It is founded on a supposition of disclaimer and retraction on my part. Sir, I renounce all favor from this House on the ground of disclaimer or retraction. I have disclaimed nothing I have done or said. I have retracted nothing: I have done my duty; and I should do it again, under the same circumstances, if it were to be done to-morrow!

Members of this House have accused me of consuming the time of the House, by presenting abolition petitions. Is it I, or they, who have done this? If, sir, gentlemen who are opposed to these petitions had permitted them to

pass to the table under the rule, no time would have been consumed. If the Speaker had promptly answered my question, no time would have been consumed in this debate. I should never have occupied half an hour on a Monday, in presenting these petitions, which I have felt it due to the petitioners generally, to present singly, had not gentlemen risen to thwart me in the discharge of my duty. Sir, I protest against the consummation of the time, taken up by debates growing out of objections made by other members, being charged to me. I appeal to the House, I appeal to the nation, that it is not I, but those who object to my doings in the discharge of my duty, who are answerable for this consumption of time.

And now, sir, I have done. I have only to add that I had hoped that the gentleman from Virginia, (Mr. Patton,) seeing that the House could not be brought to a direct censure of me, would have had the magnanimity to withdraw his resolution to effect that object indirectly. He insists upon having the question taken, and the House must decide.

[The effect of this speech on the House has been rarely if ever exceeded by the influence of any speech on any assembly. It was delivered after the opponents of Mr. A. had inflamed themselves, to the highest exacerbation, by most vehement harangues for four days. The speaker had to address a majority strongly prejudiced against him, and eager to seize any tolerable ground of censure for his previous course in presenting abolition petitions. And yet the result of this speech, under all these disadvantages, was, that but 22 members could be found to vote even indirectly and remotely to censure. All the resolutions were rejected.]

THE editor of the *Western Messenger*, published in Louisville, Kentucky, December, 1836, copies the following poem, and says, "It is so full of fire and spirit, so original, so picturesque, that it must give pleasure to every reader. The five verses beginning "*Shall our New England,*" are equal to almost any thing in Campbell. Though no friends of abolitionism, we like good poetry on any and every subject."

## L I N E S

*Written on the passage of Mr. Pinckney's Resolutions, in the House of Representatives, and of Mr. Calhoun's "Bill of Abominations," in the Senate of the United States.*

BY J. G. WHITTIER.

Now, by our fathers' ashes! where's the spirit  
 Of the true-hearted and the unshackled gone?  
 Sons of old freemen, do we but inherit  
Their *names* alone?

Is the old Pilgrim spirit quenched within us?  
 Stoops the proud manhood of our souls so low,  
 That Mammon's lure or Party's wile can win us  
To silence now?

No—when our land to ruin's brink is verging,  
 In God's name, let us speak while there is time!  
 Now, when the padlocks for our lips are forging,  
SILENCE IS CRIME!



What! shall we henceforth humbly ask as favors  
Rights all our own? In madness shall we barter,  
For treacherous peace, the FREEDOM Nature gave us,  
God and our charter?

*Here* shall the statesman seek the free to fetter?  
Here Lynch law light its horrid fires on high?  
And, in the church, their proud and skilled abettor  
Make truth a lie?—

Torture the pages of the hallowed Bible,  
To sanction crime, and robbery, and blood?  
And, in Oppression's hateful service, libel  
Both man and God?

Shall our New England stand erect no longer,  
But stoop in chains upon her downward way,  
Thicker to gather on her limbs and stronger  
Day after day?

O, no; methinks from all her wild, green mountains—  
From valleys where her slumbering fathers lie—  
From her blue rivers and her welling fountains,  
And clear, cold sky;—

From her rough coast, and isles, which hungry Ocean  
Gnaws with his surges—from the fisher's skiff,  
With white sail swaying to the billows' motion  
Round rock and cliff;—

From the free fire-side of her unbought farmer—  
From her free laborer at his loom and wheel—  
From the brown smith-shop, where, beneath the hammer,  
Rings the red steel;—

From each and all, if God hath not forsaken  
Our land, and left us to an evil choice,  
Loud as the summer thunderbolt shall waken  
A PEOPLE'S VOICE!

Startling and stern! the northern winds shall bear it  
Over Potomac's to St. Mary's wave;  
And buried Freedom shall awake to hear it  
Within her grave.

O, let that voice go forth! The bondman, sighing  
By Santee's wave, in Mississippi's cane,  
Shall feel the hope, within his bosom dying,  
Revive again.

Let it go forth! The millions who are gazing  
Sadly upon us from afar, shall smile,  
And, unto God devout thanksgiving raising,  
Bless us the while.

O, for your ancient freedom, pure and holy,  
For the deliverance of a groaning earth,  
For the wronged captive, bleeding, crushed, and lowly,  
Let it go forth!

Sons of the best of fathers! will ye falter  
With all they left ye periled and at stake?  
Ho! once again on Freedom's holy altar  
The fire awake!

Prayer-strengthened for the trial, come together,  
Put on the harness for the moral fight,  
And, with the blessing of your heavenly Father,  
MAINTAIN THE RIGHT!

## STANZAS FOR THE TIMES.\*

BY J. G. WHITTIER.

[First published in the Boston Courier.]

Is this the land our fathers loved ?

The freedom which they toiled to win ?

Is this the soil whereon they moved ?

Are these the graves they slumber in ?

Are *we* the sons by whom are borne

The mantles which the dead have worn ?

And shall we crouch above these graves,

With craven soul and fettered lip ?

Yoke in with marked and branded SLAVES,

And tremble at the driver's whip ?—

Bend to the earth our pliant knees,

And speak—but as our masters please ?

Shall outraged Nature cease to feel ?

Shall Mercy's tears no longer flow ?

Shall ruffian threats of cord and steel—

The dungeon's gloom—th' assassin's blow

Turn back the spirit roused to save

Our Truth—our Country—and the *Slave* ?

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\* The "Times" alluded to were those evil times of the pro-slavery meeting in Faneuil Hall (August 21, 1835,) for the suppression of freedom of speech, lest it should endanger the foundations of commercial society.

Of human skulls that shrine was made,  
 Whereon the priests of Mexico  
 Before their loathsome idol prayed—  
 Is Freedom's altar fashioned so ?  
 And must we yield to Freedom's God,  
 As offering meet, the negro's blood ?

Shall tongues be mute, when deeds are wrought  
 Which well might shame extremest hell ?  
 Shall freemen lock th' indignant thought ?  
 Shall Mercy's bosom cease to swell ?  
 Shall Honor bleed ? Shall Truth succumb ?  
 Shall pen, and press, and *soul*, be dumb ?

No—by each spot of haunted ground  
 Where Freedom weeps her children's fall—  
 By Plymouth's rock and Bunker's mound—  
 By Griswold's stained and shattered wall—  
 By Warren's ghost—by Langdon's shade—  
 By all the memories of our dead !—

By their enlarging souls, which burst  
 The bands and fetters round them set—  
 By the FREE PILGRIM SPIRIT nursed  
 Within our inmost bosoms, yet,—  
 By all above—around—below—  
 Be ours th' indignant answer—NO !

No—guided by our country's laws,  
 For truth and right, and suffering man,

Be ours to strive in Freedom's cause,  
As Christians *may*--as freemen *can*!  
Still pouring on unwilling ears  
That truth oppression only fears.

What--shall we guard our neighbor still,  
While *woman* shrieks beneath his rod,  
And while he tramples down at will  
The image of a common God?  
Shall watch and ward be round him set  
Of northern nerve and bayonet?

And shall we know and share with him  
The danger and the open shame?  
And see our Freedom's light grow dim,  
Which should have filled the world with flame?  
And, writhing, feel, where'er we turn,  
A world's reproach around us burn?

Is't not enough that this is borne?  
And asks our haughty neighbor more?  
Must fetters which his slaves have worn  
Clank round the Yankee farmer's door?  
Must *he* be told, beside his plough,  
*What* he must speak, and *when*, and *how*?

Must *he* be told his Freedom stands  
On Slavery's dark foundations strong--  
On breaking hearts and fettered hands,  
On robbery, and crime, and wrong?--

That all his fathers taught is vain ?  
That Freedom's emblem is the chain?—

Its life, its soul, from *Slavery* drawn ?  
False—foul—profane ! go—teach as well  
Of holy Truth from Falsehood born !  
Of heaven refreshed by airs from hell !  
Of Virtue nursed by open Vice !  
Of demons planting paradise !

Rail on, then, “brethren of the South”—  
Ye shall not hear the truth the less—  
No seal is on the Yankee's mouth,  
No fetter on the Yankee's press !  
From our Green Mountains to the sea,  
One voice shall thunder—**WE ARE FREE !**

**IT WILL BE PUBLISHED, JUNE 1,**

*And for sale at 25 Cornhill, Boston,*

“**POEMS**, written during the Progress of the Abolition Question in the United States, between the Years 1830 and 1837 ; by **JOHN G. WHITTIER.**”—Embellished with a fine English copper-plate engraving, the design suggested by reading Cowper's poem entitled the “Morning Dream.”













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